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Discrimination against Dalits in Contemporary

India:

Affirmative Action, Religious Conversions and Women's

Activism as Responses to Caste-based Social Injustice

by

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Thesis submitted

for the Degree of Masters by Research

2017

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ABSTRACT

Due to entrenched social caste divisions, discrimination against Dalits is a serious on-going issue in contemporary India. This thesis focuses on how the caste system affects the lives and treatment of Dalits. It highlights that, as the caste system is the focal point of Hindu society, it affects every aspect of Indian life and is impossible to escape from.

It also discusses how the government has attempted to close the gap of inequality using affirmative action policies. However, evidence suggests that the government is more concerned with the appearance of eradicating untouchability discrimination, than actually making continuous steps to help Dalits and change caste-based viewpoints. In many ways, the government has served to worsen the social divide.

Dalits have fought for an escape from discrimination by converting to other religions, such as Buddhism and Christianity. Conversion to Buddhism has been moderately successful in uniting Dalits under a common goal of escaping untouchability, but has failed to create real separation from Hinduism. There are differences found between Christian denominations as to the treatment of Dalits. Pentecostalism has provided Dalits with a life completely devoid of caste. However, Dalits that converted to Catholicism found no reprieve from caste-based discrimination, as the social hierarchy is a strong feature in Indian Catholic communities. Also, as Christian conversion is heavily objected to, India has seen an increase in caste-related violence as a result.

Dalit women face unique discrimination, separate from dalit discrimination as a whole. In traditional settings, women are treated as sex slaves and objects. In upwardly mobile settings they are responsible for maintaining the family's elevated social status. Dalit women become controlled by their men, an imitation of upper caste traditions, and are victims of domestic violence.

All of this research concludes that a true eradication of the practice of untouchability is impossible, without a complete reformation of India's education system and Hindu society. This includes denouncing the caste system as the core of Indian society, and the encompassing beliefs of hierarchy. Only this will enable Dalits to live as equals.

This thesis is dedicated to my mum

Acknowledgements

I am delighted to express deep gratitude and love towards a few people who were crucial to the successful completion of this research. I am particularly grateful to Dr. David Burton who guided me meticulously throughout this project, by patiently correcting and encouraging me and also by understanding all of my concerns. Without him, this thesis would not have seen completion. I also want to thank Dr. Maria Diemling for reading the draft and giving helpful comments, which enabled me to turn it into a better piece of work. I would also like to acknowledge the concern shown by Dr. Robert Beckford and the help he provided towards the focus and completion of this dissertation. I wish to thank the entire humanities school at Canterbury Christ Church University, and the lecturers who encouraged my passion for religious studies. I would like to thank my father, Robert, who stood with me throughout this project, supporting me to finance my studies. I also wish to thank my brother, Oliver, who encouraged me through late nights of studying and stressful times. Finally, and most importantly, I wish to express my thanks, thoughts and love to my late mother, Zaneta, who inspires my love for religion, and never failed to extend thoughts and prayers to those less fortunate than herself.

Abbreviations

A.A.	Affirmative Action
B.J.P.	Bharitaya Janata Party
B.S.P.	Bahujan Samaj Party
D.M.K.	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
D.M.S.	Dalit Mahila Samiti
D.S.S.	Dalit Stree Shakti
D.S.S.	Dalit Sanghaish Samithi
G.O.I.	Government of India
I.A.S.	Indian Administrative Service
I.F.S.	Indian Foreign Service
N.C.R.B	National Crime Record Bureau
O.B.C.	Other Backward Caste
P.O.A.	Prevention of Atrocities Act
R.S.S.	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
S.C.	Scheduled Caste
S.T.	Scheduled Tribe
V.H.P.	Vishva Hindu Parishad
U.S.	United States

Introduction

Despite the practice of untouchability being abolished in 1950, Dalits continue to face daily social discrimination in India, due to issues with education and entrenched caste divisions. This thesis will focus on how and why the caste system continues to form the basis of Hindu society in India, with particular reference to how this affects the lives and treatments of India's Dalits/ untouchables. It will explore the complexities surrounding the nature of caste and how all aspects of Indian society are affected and shaped by notions of caste and class divisions and hierarchy. It will establish ways in which Dalits have fought for social equality and justice, in the forms of conversion and women's activism, and how successful their struggles have been. It will also analyse government attempts to close the gap in society that caste divisions have caused, by means of affirmative action. Furthermore, it will explore how entrenched caste notions of purity and untouchability are interwoven in all aspects of India, from the government to the grass-roots of society, which causes complexities in the fight for dalit social justice.

Methodology

This thesis has been researched and written using an interdisciplinary approach that has relied on text-based research and insights, which have been analysed from a range of perspectives. I analysed sources from both a religious point of view and a political science perspective, and discovered the distinct symbiotic relationship between religion and politics in India, which has affected the social view of caste. As the caste system is at the heart of Hindu culture, this thesis also analysed sources from a cultural and social perspective, in order to gain insight into the effects caste discrimination has had on the relationship between castes and the inter-caste relationship between Dalits. As my research developed it became clear that all aspects of India life are connected and interlinked with each other e.g. religion, politics and the social structure of India are all intertwined. This is the reason I structured my thesis as a three-chapter compare and contrast between different social positions within the caste system and India's hierarchical system, to establish how each position are reacting/ dealing with the social injustice that Dalits are facing.

A range of sources, both academic and non-academic, have been analysed and synthesised to form an original argument. Academic sources, from scholars such as Dirks, Jodhka, Deliege, etc., have been used to explore the theories and history of the caste system in India. I have also used academic secondary sources, such as scholarly journals that discuss and evaluate other scholars' theories, as these are important for showing the progression of theories surrounding caste, from its vedic roots to the modern perception of caste that exists in contemporary India. Secondary academic sources also assist in establishing weaknesses in academic arguments. Primary sources, such as government statistics regarding the number of atrocities that have occurred against Dalits or the percentages of Dalits that have benefitted from A.A. policies, are extremely important as they show factual evidence of the current issues in India and also evidence of the progress that has been made in contemporary times.

It is also important to note that I have made careful use of recent media reports, such as newspaper articles and television documentaries, as this thesis is concerned with the contemporary caste issues in India. There is also use of non-academic primary sources from particular perspectives, such as Hindu nationalists or religious converts, in order to compare a range of opinions. However, these sources have been treated with appropriate scrutiny, as opinion-based sources are always rooted in a biased perspective. As gender issues are one of the main topics covered in this thesis, the sources used have been written by a combination of both male and female authors, in order to prevent gender bias, as this thesis will cover both male and female dalit issues of discrimination. Naturally, a conscious effort has been made on my part to remain openminded; however, as with all academic writing, there is an inevitable bias. My perspective as a white, educated, western woman is reflected in my research. As a woman, I find the topic of female activism important and relatable. Also, as an educated western citizen, the empowerment of disenchanted groups is a very interesting topic. My identity as an educated, western woman is the reason that I chose this topic, in order to understand the vast difference between dalit experiences of social hierarchy and my own.

What is caste?

It is very problematic to define exactly what the caste system is in India. Over 3000 years ago, vedic society was divided into the four classes of varna, a principle of identifying people according to their employment. Varna divided society into four classes: Brahmans (priests), Kṣatriyas (warriors), Vaiśyas (commoners) and Śūdras (servants). This is illustrated in book 10 of Rg Veda, using the story of the sacrifice of the cosmic man: “When they divided Purusa how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet? The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Kṣatriya made. His thighs became the Vaiśya, from his feet the śūdra was produced,” (Leaf, 2014, p.49). The Rg Veda is the earliest literary source of Hindu society, and there are no mentions of untouchables or anyone below śūdras in the varna system.

Another concept used equally frequently for exploring the origin of caste is *Jāti*. *Jāti* derives from the root meaning of birth. The two concepts of *jāti* and varna overlap in some ways but are distinctly different. Some scholars, such as A.A.MacDonell, argued that the basic division of caste was traditionally varna, and all *Jātis* are subdivisions of caste as the result of intermarriage between the four varnas (MacDonell, 1914, p.235). This idea is rooted in Manu, who stated that the *jātis* are the consequences of mixed marriages and the lowest *jāti*, the *candāla*, are born from the union of *sūdra* women with Brahmans (Manu, 10.16). Whilst there is no mention of untouchables in the varna system, perhaps the *candāla jāti* marked the beginnings of untouchability. In early Dharmashashtra texts, *Cāndalas* were sometimes categorised as *śūdras*, but a distinction between the two was established very soon (Singh, 2008, p.294). The *cāndalas* were the group of people in ancient Indian society that disposed of corpses. They were considered below the four varnas, a fifth class, viewed as both unclean and untouchable (Viswanath, 2014, p. 268). This is the first known case of the labelling of untouchability.

Whilst the caste system that is present in Indian society today has roots in the ancient principles of varna and *jāti*, it has also evolved from constant changes to the economy, migration and by the

creation of new occupations. B.K Smith defined the caste system as “part of a larger ‘chain of being’, fitting into a cosmical hierarchy in which various categories (Jāti) are arranged in varying degrees of subtlety and purity,” (Smith, 1994, pp. 27-28). On the other hand, scholars such as Dirks argue that the modern understanding of the caste system, identifying and absorbing India’s diverse social identities into one system, is a British invention (Dirks, 2001). Dirks believes that caste is a modern phenomenon, rather than a basic expression of Indian tradition, that is a product of the encounter between India and British colonial rule. There are regional variations to caste and the nature of the caste system is forever shifting, making it tricky to identify a unified understanding of caste. Despite the complexity surrounding the roots of the caste system, it is now an integral part of Indian society. Gavin Flood identified four characteristics to the caste system:

- 1) Hierarchical structure in any region, with the Brahmans at the top, the untouchables at the bottom. Between these are a wide array of other castes.
- 2) The caste hierarchy is based on the polarity between purity and pollution, the Brahmans being the most pure, the untouchables the most impure.
- 3) The caste of any individual is inalienable; it is a property of the body and cannot be removed (except according to some traditions by initiation).
- 4) There are strict rules of caste endogamy and commensality. (Flood, 2010, p.59)

These characteristics begin to show the restrictions that are placed upon Hindu society, but this thesis will focus on the treatment of untouchables/Dalits. By examining these characteristics, it is evident that Dalits are considered to belong at the bottom of the social order, are believed to be polluted and impure, are expected to marry only between their fellow untouchables, and have no way of escaping/removing this fate. From here, the beginnings of dalit discrimination and the poor treatment that they have suffered and continue to suffer, can be acknowledged.

Theories and myths about the origin of Dalits and their untouchability

As the development of the caste system has been outlined above, it is now time to focus on the origin of Dalits. There are several terms used in India to describe the ‘polluted’ caste. ‘Untouchable’ is not a

term often used in India, as untouchability was officially outlawed in 1949. Paraiyar is another term sometimes used to describe untouchables. Paraiyars were originally a caste group from Tamil Nadu, who took up ‘unclean’ occupations, such as corpse burial and scavenging. In contemporary India, Paraiyar is not a name used to describe an untouchable from any caste. Mahatma Gandhi used the term ‘Harijans’, meaning God’s children, but most Dalits have rejected this term as it is considered “derogative and insulting,” (The Hindu, 2003). The official name used in India is scheduled castes, as this is how the government identifies minorities that qualify for reservation, along with Tribals and other backward castes (this will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter). This thesis will use the term ‘Dalit’, as it is a self-identifying term, meaning oppressed or broken.

Dalits being considered as untouchable is centred around the notion of impurity. The *Cāndala Jāti* mentioned earlier are an example of this, as their contact with corpses is what identifies them as impure. Although there is no definite proof of when the notion of purity and impurity began, Dalits believe in several myths to explain the creation of their caste. One of these myths was recorded by Thurston in 1909:

There were 2 brothers who were poor. They went together to pray to God. God asked them to remove the carcass of a dead cow. The elder brother answered “*Een thambi pappA.A.n*,” (my younger brother will do it), but understood “*Een thambi pA.A.ppA.A.n*” (my brother is a Brahman); since that day the younger brother became a Brahman and the elder brother a paraiyar. All castes originate from these two brothers. (Thurston, 1909, p.84)

This myth illustrates that, up until direct contact with the polluted carcass, both brothers were equal. It also shows that it is not a Dalit’s fault or choice to be a Dalit, which suggests the disdain and blame against Dalits by upper castes is unfair. The characteristics of the caste system prevent Dalits from escaping the ‘pollution’ which makes them untouchable, and yet they are punished for an existence they cannot change. Guru explains this injustice in a succinct and detailed manner:

“The ideology of purity- pollution, which is the core of Brahmanism, forces Dalits to carry with them all the time a morally degrading meaning, even if some of them have moved out of

defiling jobs such as scavenging and other sanitary work. Those Dalits who still find themselves chained to the obnoxious job of manual scavenging and rag picking continue to remain repulsive objects of intolerance. The touchable caste pushes Dalits first into degraded/inhuman forms of jobs, then uses the same dislocation and stigmatizes them. Thus, the upper castes invent justification for their intolerance of Dalits. This burden of stigma remains attached to Dalits across time and space. The ideology of Brahmanism thus turns Dalits into a walking carcass or mobile dirt, and their colonies into stigmatised ghettos that look almost similar to the apartheid that existed in South Africa.” (Guru, 2016)

These theories and arguments suggest that it is the Brahmins and higher castes that ensure the survival of the caste system in India. Louis Dumont theorised that hierarchy is the essence of caste, and it is focussed on the superiority of the pure over the impure. The German sociologist, Max Weber, agreed with Dumont on the caste focus over hierarchy. He viewed the caste system as an extreme case of status groups found in all areas of society, and that the caste system was rigid and unchanging (Weber, 2009, p.406). J. P. Mencher agreed with this theory, arguing that the caste system “functions as a very effective system of economic exploitation,” (Mencher, 1974, p.469). This exploitation can be seen in different ways throughout the entirety of India.

However, in later years, scholars have challenged these theories and argued for the changing nature of caste society. This can be seen in arguments set forth by scholars such as Nicholas Dirks, who argued that the existence of the modern-day caste systems that exists today is the result of British colonisation, and it is vastly different to the caste system that existed pre-colonisation. This theory was named ‘caste as India tradition’ by Surinder Jodhka, who described that, although varna/*Jāti* social divisions existed, including the practice of pollution and untouchability, the modern-day theorisation of caste as it is practised today began when the British colonised India. This is an extension of Dirks’ theory, who believed that the British perceived caste as “a local form of civil society, which was responsible to India’s political weakness and symptom of the over-development of its religion pre-occupations,” (Dirks, 2001, p.40). I disagree with Dirks’ view that the caste system is

a British colonial invention, as it pre-existed colonialism still as a central feature of Hindu society, but rather suggest that colonialism solidified the caste divisions into the caste system that is known and used in India today. The British solidified the distinctions between caste when they made a census of India, in an attempt to classify the entire population by caste: “systematic ethnography effectively began in 1871, when the first national census of India was carried out. Indian census included questions about caste membership,” (Fuller, 2010, p.72). They worked on the assumption that everyone in India belongs to a caste and that castes were real identifiable groups (Sharma, 2002, p.8). Before colonialism, the lines between caste were a lot more flexible, but caste still existed in Indian society. These changes to the caste system throughout history highlights that the system is constantly evolving due to the different impacting factors in India society.

What influences the caste system and how does it directly affect the treatment of Dalits

As the caste system forms the foundation of Hindu society, its practices and beliefs are woven into every aspect of everyday life. Education and employment is affected by caste. It has been established that untouchability was created by upper castes. Now the question must be asked of how do upper castes keep control of Dalits? What affects the daily lives of Dalits in contemporary India?

1) Location

Location in India is very important when examining the daily lives and treatment of Dalits. As the 7th largest country in the world, with a population of over 1.2 billion people, there are many variations of cultures and beliefs (WorldAtlas.C.om, 2017). Culture is often regionally diverse, with each state having its own laws, as well as enforcing the laws created by the country’s government as a whole. There are also cultural differences between North and South India, in relation to Dalits. There is more religion-related violence occurring in North India, as conversion to Buddhism and also Christianity is more popular in North Indian than South India. However, dalit political parties are more prominent in South India, and the upward social mobility of dalit communities occurs more frequently in villages in South India.

As well as differences between North and south India, there are also variations in the circumstances of rural vs. urban Dalits. In rural areas, Dalits often live in mud huts in small communities on the outskirts of villages. They are often socially and physically isolated, living miles away from access to medical care and other immunities. Rural Dalits tend to be dependent on upper castes, as they are usually indebted to them as landlords or employers (Dalitsolidarity.com, 2017). In contrast, urban Dalits in the cities commonly live in overcrowded slums. These are also terrible living conditions, with around a million residents crammed into one square mile. There are extremely high risks of disease in city slums. Various diseases are associated with the exposure of unsanitary conditions in slum areas, such as malaria and typhoid fever (Praharaj, 2013).

2) Police and local government

Police casteism is another problem for Dalits in contemporary India. In 2016, Kanch Ilaiah stated “our police carry their caste with them: even when they are on duty they practice discrimination,” (The Quint, 2016). Even the former Maharashtra director general of police confirmed “there were instances where the police discriminated against people from the lower castes. The P.O.A. (Prevention of Atrocities) act is of a little help,” (the Quint, 2016). This makes it difficult for Dalits to fight for social justice, if they do not have a judgement-free police system to report caste-related incidents to.

3) Politics

Whilst India gained independence in 1947 and quickly formed the Indian constitution, which abolished the practice of untouchability, there are still many issues in politics that assist the continuation of caste discrimination. The Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.), a right-wing nationalist party led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, are currently in government. The B.J.P. is also associated with the *Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsēvaka Saṅgha* (R.S.S.), a Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation who endorse the Hindutva (Hindu-ness) ideology. The R.S.S. and the B.J.P. have attempted to harmonise Phule-Ambedkar dalit equality thought with Hindutva philosophy, by establishing the Samajik Samrasta Manch (social harmony platform). The objective of this campaign was to integrate Dalits into Hindu society, which was highly important for the B.J.P., in order to enlarge their support base by gaining dalit votes (Gupta, 2016). However, they wish to integrate Dalits into society without

upsetting the hierarchy of the caste system. This is unacceptable to assertive Dalits, who believe that traditional Hinduism is the reason for their low social status.

4) Education

Education is one of the biggest problems that Dalits face in contemporary India. In rural areas, many Dalits are illiterate, which leads to less employment opportunities and a lack of understanding their own rights. Although the government has made provisions to help educate Dalits it has been met with considerable resistance: “The project of educating the low castes may have met with resistance from the upper castes who feared that such a project and consequent upward mobility of the lower castes would jeopardise the control and management of their low caste worker, dependents and servants,” (Tharamangalam, 2012).

India holds a ‘free and compulsory’ education act, stating that every child receives free education between the ages of 6 and 14. Unfortunately that does not ensure that every child receives the same standard of education. In some schools, students are made to wear colour-coded wrist bands to identify which caste they belong to (Marszal, 2015). It is also common for dalit children to be forced to sit outside the classroom, away from the other children (Coudere, 2016). This will automatically affect a child’s ability to learn, as they cannot interact with the rest of the class and have limited access to resources. It has also been recorded that dalit children are sent out during lesson time to clean the school toilets, which results in them missing out on class time (Mukulli, 2009).

The standard of living for a dalit also has an impact on a dalit child’s education. As shown in the previous paragraph, many Dalits, particularly those who live in rural areas, live miles away from school. This also increases their social isolation from the rest of their community, setting them at a disadvantage.

5) Employment

Dalit children get forced into labour, as their families need the money to survive. Siddharth Kara, the director of the Carr Centre program on human trafficking and modern slavery at Harvard University, has estimated that ten to thirty million children are forced to work in India, to help their families to

survive. The most common fields children are found in include leather processing, sewage cleaning and refuse scavenging, which are all traditionally associated with Dalits and the lowest castes (Kara, quoted in Dominguez, 2014).

These jobs are not only specifically occupied by dalit children. Dalit men are forced to go down to the sewers without protective gear. In Tamil Nadu, more than 200 dalit men have died from toxic gases when descending to clean sewers (The Hindu, 2016). Many Dalits are forced to continue in these repugnant jobs and receive social ostracism as their thanks (Harriss- White and Rodrigo, 2015).

These aspects of Indian society and dalit life will be seen as regularly themes throughout this thesis. The first chapter will be focused on the government attempts to combat discrimination against Dalits by way of affirmative action policies. The second chapter will analyse the success of religious conversion as a means of escaping caste discrimination. The final chapter will examine the unique struggle of dalit women and the steps they have taken to improve their social situation. The conclusion will focus on comparing the results of each chapter, to establish whether there is a solution to be found for the poor treatment and social discrimination that Dalits face on a daily basis.

Chapter 1

Affirmative Action: Its strengths and challenges

This chapter is focussed on affirmative action and the impact it has had on the treatment of Dalits in India. It will examine the history and concept of affirmative action in India, and compare it to affirmative action in the United States, in order to establish weaknesses within A.A. in general, and to compare if it has seen more success in western culture than eastern. It will deal with problems of poor implementation and discuss how a minority label can potentially cause more problems than it solves. This chapter will then explore how the education system is affected by affirmative action, and establish that although affirmative action is flawed, it can help provide Dalits with a platform to voice their own rights. Furthermore, this chapter will deal with the success and failures of quotas in India, and discuss the possibility of Hinduism and affirmative action working harmoniously. Finally, this chapter will attempt to illustrate how affirmative action is just one element of a much bigger plan that will be needed in order to eliminate untouchability in Indian society, as it is currently being used to cloak the real issues of caste discrimination and how to solve them.

What is affirmative action?

Affirmative action is a “phrase that refers to attempts to bring members of underrepresented groups, usually groups that have suffered discrimination, into a higher degree of participation in some beneficial program. Some affirmative action efforts include preferential treatment; others do not,” (Greenawalt, 1983, p.17). In India, affirmative action is class-based, focussing on overcoming the discrimination against Dalits and other backward castes. This is different to the U.S., as their affirmative actions are focussed on overcoming race based discrimination. Unfortunately, affirmative action is often accused of increasing the awareness of class and racial identities, which can lead to further entrenching class divisions, rather than extinguishing them. Despite the difference between American and Indian affirmative action, there are many ways in which the policies could learn from each other, in both strengths and weaknesses. The theory behind affirmative action can only be viewed as positive, as the intention is to eliminate discrimination and to help the people who have

previously been discriminated against. In reality, though, many flaws have been found within the implementation of Affirmative action (A.A.), which have led to suggestions of extinguishing A.A. policies. The main problem with these arguments is that they do not necessarily produce an alternative theory or action, meaning that eliminating A.A. would simply result in the discrimination remaining.

Affirmative action in India began in a similar way to how it was formed in the United States. When India regained independence in 1947, the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Indian constitution drafted an affirmative action policy, which was contained in article 46. It stated that “the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular the scheduled castes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation,” (legalIndia.com, 2016). The new constitution recognised that “untouchables and tribals deserved special provisions and provides a legal basis for reservation of seats in the governments for these ‘deserving’ groups,” (Chatterji, 1996, p.296).

The Roots of Affirmative Action and its application in India

The beginnings of A.A. could be seen long before India gained its independence. In 1902, the Maharajah Shahu introduced reservation in some degree. He provided free education to all in his state and ensured suitable employment for students. He also appealed for the abolition of untouchability (B.S.P.India.org, 2017).

During the British raj, other elements of reservation emerged. In 1932, at the round table conference, the Communal Award was announced, providing separate representation for Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans. This caused controversy, as Gandhi fasted in protest against it whilst the dalit leader, Dr Ambedkar, favoured the Communal Award. They eventually reached an agreement where Ambedkar could have a single Hindu electorate, with Dalits having seats reserved within it. But electorates for other religions remained separate. The agreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi became known as the Poona Pact (Menon, 2015, p.49).

Now, affirmative action is made up of reservation quotas in both employment and education. This was created to ensure that SC (Scheduled castes/ Dalits) and ST (scheduled tribes) would have some degree of access to jobs and education. Quotas in higher education are as follows: 15% reserved for SC and 7.4% reserved for STs for both undergraduate and post-graduate courses. In 2006, via the 93rd constitutional amendment, a mandatory quota of 27% was introduced for other backward castes (O.B.C.) for higher education also. The quotas in employment are a little less straightforward. In the public sector, jobs are classified into 4 types: class 1 is the highest paid job, and includes jobs such as the officers of the Indian administrative service (I.A.S.), Indian foreign service (I.F.S.), Indian police service and other related central-government services. Class 2 employees are officers of the state civil-service cadre. Both classes 1 and 2 jobs are filled through competitive examinations and interviews. Classes 3 and 4 consist of low skill and low qualification jobs. These also provide the lowest income and form the majority of government employment (Deshpande, 2013, pp.86-87).

Posts are reserved for SCs, STs and O.B.C.s in all four classes via direct recruitment. When recruitment is at national level by open competition, e.g. union public service commission, the reservation for SC is 15%, for ST is 7.5% and O.B.C. is 27%. But if the recruitment is not through open competition, the quotas change to 16.6% for SC, 7.5% for ST and 25.84% for O.B.C. For class 3 and 4 jobs, that attract mainly local applicants, the percentage of reserved seats is fixed in proportion to the SC-ST population in that given area, and for O.B.C.s the quota is fixed to not exceed 27% (Deshpande, 2013, p.86).

The implementation of quotas has improved over time. For class 1 jobs, between 1964-1984, the share of SCs increased from 1.6% to 7%. Between 1994-2004 a sharper increase could be seen. SC share became 12.2% by the end of 2004. These statistics provide an initial impression that A.A. policies have been successful in providing Dalits equal access or opportunities within employment that would not have been easily accessible before. Sheth argues that this reflected the aftermath of the Mandal commission, which created the space for a greater assertion of Dalit or low-caste activism, one consequence of which was the better implementation of quotas (Sheth, 2004, p.13). Before the 1990s,

for years quotas remained unfulfilled. Galanter believed that this could be attributed to “indifference/hostility on the part of the appointing authorities, insufficient publicization of vacancies and the sheer expense of application,” (Galanter, 1984, p.97).

The problem of O.B.C.

O.B.C. is perhaps the category that has brought the most controversy towards affirmative action. This is mainly because it is difficult to determine who qualifies as a ‘lower represented’ group. In India this is difficult, as there are many different categories of caste and backward castes. It was finally decided with the introduction of the Mandal commission that SC (Dalits), ST and O.B.C. (Such as Muslims and Christians) should be granted reservation, although it was never officially decided what defines a person/ community as O.B.C. (Chatterji, 1996, p.304). This shows a distinct weakness in the theory and implementation of A.A. in India, as the government has created no clear guidelines as to who is and isn’t eligible for A.A. This results in caste communities attempting to gain the O.B.C. status, in order to gain access to reservations. This, in turn, is taking away opportunities from minorities that really need the assistance of reservation quotas to find employment.

The lack of guidelines over eligibility in A.A. policies has also created issues within the United States. Although the Civil Rights movement was created initially to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to ensure protection of their citizenship rights, it did not stop there. As discussed by Terry Eastland, the major problem that is caused by A.A. in America is the fact that the programs are indifferent to whether or not the claimants are U.S. citizens or not. He stated that 75% of people who come to the U.S. are of an ethnic background, which makes them automatically eligible for A.A., regardless of the citizenship status and how recently they arrived in the country. This allows immigrants that have no past experience of discrimination by the U.S. to reap rewards or special help that should be reserved for those who have been previously discriminated against (Eastland, 1997, p.17). This shows that in order for A.A. to be successful in aiding the citizens that need help, and to prevent other communities from taking advantage of reservations, distinct guidelines and rules over eligibility need to be implemented.

There are numerous examples in India of castes fighting for legal recognition as ‘backwards’, in order to access the advantages of government quotas. In 2015 there was a protest movement aimed at declaring the Patidar community as ‘backwards’. Patidars are a politically dominant section of Gujarati society, and known as key players in the Indian diamond trade. Therefore, they are not a community that would traditionally be named ‘oppressed’, but a backwards status would still give the Patidars access to 50% of government jobs and places in education that are currently reserved for ‘backward’ castes under affirmative action (Iyengar, 2015). Jaffrelot pointed out another group fighting for the backward status- the *Jātis*. *Jātis* are an agricultural caste group in Haryana, and spread across seven other states in North India. They have been fighting for the ‘backward’ label since the Gurnham Singh report in 1991 favoured their inclusion on the list of O.B.C.s. This protest has been used as a political advantage by the B.J.P., who promised the *Jātis* a reclassification of O.B.C.s if the B.J.P. were voted to power (Jaffrelot, 2011, p.441). To this day, they are still not recognised as a ‘backward’ class. These are just two examples of many groups who wish to be considered as ‘backward’. Raman also points out a case where the label of backward class was considered so valuable in India that over 100 people were killed. In Nagpur, 1994, a printing error resulted in the Gowari tribe from being left off the list of O.B.C. on affirmative action scrolls. As a result, the Gowari believed they were not being given the status of ‘backward’, and 40,000 of them mobbed the statehouse in a riot (Raman, 1999, p.30). All of this evidence confirms that it is imperative that distinct restrictions need to be put in place to establish a cohesive set of guidelines stating who is eligible for government quotas, in order to prevent the controversy and violent retaliations that are occurring over A.A. eligibility in India.

Identities and labelling

The lack of differentiation between who does and does not qualify for a minority status is a problem, as it has been used by A.A. opposition to suggest that A.A. is ‘reverse discrimination’. This is the term used to describe how affirmative action can supply so many rights to minorities that they end up becoming the privileged, and the ‘elite’ citizens then become the ones subjected to discrimination.

This argument has been used to suggest that affirmative action can never successfully create equality, as it will always favour a certain group of people. However, in the case of India, this argument is incorrect. There has been no evidence found that shows that A.A. has enabled Dalits to become more elite than other castes. In fact, evidence analysed throughout this chapter highlights that, in many cases, the existence of A.A. has served to increase caste divisions and dalit discrimination. The argument that A.A. is ‘reverse discrimination’ could arguably be an excuse given by higher castes who do not want minorities to gain access to employment and education, and wish the discrimination against Dalits to continue. This idea has been considered by Prue Burns, who argued that ‘reverse discrimination’ has been used by opposition who wish to “deny or bury the positive intentions of affirmative action,” (Burns, 2008, p.372). Higher castes are using the argument of ‘reverse discrimination’ as an excuse to perpetuate discrimination. As shown throughout this chapter, A.A. in India has been proven to entrench the caste identities by targeting a select section of people. In this way, affirmative action and quotas can never eradicate the caste system.

Whilst majority groups are arguing that A.A. is providing ‘special treatment’ to minorities, there are also cases where minorities also dislike A.A. for the ‘labelling’ aspect that it entails. In many areas, drawing attention to the dalit identity of a person causes them to fear the increased likelihood of discrimination against them. Examples can be seen even in India’s capital, Delhi, where it is common for dalit students to hide their identities and avoid telling people their surnames, as it often results in shunning and even violence. One case of this was recorded in 2008, where a female MPhil student studying Hindi literature was denied water for three days by her landlord and wife before being physically attacked, because they discovered that she was a dalit (Sengupta, 2008). In the article, the student states that Dalits know they must hide their identities from people otherwise they know they will not receive help or be welcomed anywhere (Sengupta, 2008). It has also been the case in the past where Dalits have invented fictional surnames to hide their identities, such as Sumit Baudh. He refused to apply for university under the ‘reserved’ category, and instead he and his father invented him a new surname, Nimbekar. This was a combination of his family’s gotra, Nimb, and a salute to Dr. Ambedkar (Baudh, 2016). These are just a few examples of many cases that have occurred and

still continue to exist. Dr. Ambedkar argued that drawing attention to dalit identity is a good thing, as it must be strengthened in the short-term to allow caste to be eliminated in the long-term. However, this argument has been disputed by Andre Beteille, who believed that A.A. only serves to strengthen caste identity, which is harmful to those of the lowest and backward castes (Ashalatha, 2014, p.151).

Also, in higher education, many beneficiaries of affirmative action programs believe that it makes them look ‘incompetent’ compared to students from other castes. A recent BBC article highlighted how students are subjected to shaming and mocked as being ‘quota students’. A PhD student, Rohith Vemula, committed suicide after being shamed for gaining entry through reservations. The article also notes the absence of student support groups for reservation students, which results in warning signals of suffering students G.O.I.ng unnoticed or being ignored (Biswas, 2016). Beneficiaries of affirmative action suffer from stigma, further linked to the argument that A.A. disregards a person’s merit. It is often believed that reservations result in candidates having access to preferred positions in higher education and employment, over others who are better qualified or ‘have earned’ the position. This argument can be disputed, as it is very difficult to measure a person’s merit and efficiency: “Just as it is argued that caste-based quotas are an impressive or rough measure to target ‘true’ deprivation, exam scores could be seen as an imprecise or rough measure of underlying ‘merit’” (Deshpande, 2013, p.147). If there is a higher caste student with outstanding examination scores, and a dalit that would fill the quota of reservation, who should be given the opportunity? This is the argument given by affirmative action opposition and, whilst correct, it fails to identify the true problem. The real problem lies with the inequality of education between castes, and the number of spaces available in higher education.

Affirmative action and education

As identified in the introduction of this thesis, dalit children do not receive the same standard of education as children of other castes, and are treated in a discriminatory fashion throughout their schooling. This impacts the children’s ability to learn and grow equally. The standard of living for a dalit also has an impact on a dalit child’s education. Many Dalits are unable to send their children to

school because their families need their labour in order to earn enough money to survive. Examples of these circumstances can be seen in numerous journal and newspaper articles. Siddharth Kara, the director on human trafficking and modern slavery at Harvard's University, has estimated that ten to thirty million children are forced to work in India, to help their families survive. The most common fields children are found in include leather processing, sewage cleaning and refuse scavenging, which are all traditionally associated with Dalits and the lowest castes (Dominguez, 2014). A village study in Karnataka also showed that 96% of dalit families are located near the boundaries of villages or are isolated entirely from the village community (timesofindia.com, 2012). The physical distance between the children's homes and the school (often located at the centre of the village) is commonly too far to walk each day, resulting in low attendance or even no attendance. The psychological separation also means that children do not benefit from interacting with other children and become socially isolated. None of these aspects of a dalit's life are created by Dalits themselves, and they have no control over them. Therefore, only by dealing with these problems can it be fair to argue a position of 'merit'. As Nussbaum pointed out, "a test that purports to be a neutral measure of intelligence is full of pitfalls for the child of a minority or immigrant culture or of a less than stimulating home environment," (Nussbaum, 2012, p.81).

These points also disprove the argument that reservations are wasted on Dalits, due to the high drop-out rates in higher education. It is argued that the places should be given to general students who are more able to complete the demanding courses, rather than Dalits who have little chance of success due to poor preparation. But, as already stated above, the reason Dalits have little chance to prepare for higher education is through no fault of their own. If they were given completely equal rights and standard of living and socialising as other higher castes, they would have more of a chance to survive and thrive in higher education. A perfect analogy of this was given by Lyndon Johnson in 1965: "You do not take a person who has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and say 'you are free to compete with all the others', and still justly believe that you have been completely fair," (Robinson, 2006, p.21). This quote also indicates that affirmative action is not sufficient on its own to rid India of its deep societal inequalities. Even when education spaces are

given to Dalits, society still lashes out and begrudges the opportunities that Dalits are given. All of the problems that Dalits face stem from society viewing them as polluted and, therefore, unworthy. Until that view is changed or dealt with, Dalits will continue to be oppressed, even with affirmative action in place.

Affirmative action in the U.S. underwent, and overcame, a similar problem regarding equality in education. In 1954, there was a supreme court case of *Brown Vs. the board of education*. Black citizens were petitioning for the rights of same education and resources for their children as their white neighbours had. Mississippi senator James Eastland's view could be argued to be very similar to those of higher caste Indians: "School integration is something that the white race will not permit under any conditions; and there is not the power of compulsion on the part of the federal government to compel it," (Robinson, J. 2006, p.19). Untouchability has been outlawed for over fifty years in India and yet Dalits are still being discriminated against on a daily basis. The reason for this is because the quality between all Indian citizens is not what the entire society wants. Affirmative action will never work if the local authorities and other members in each society do not want it to work.

Affirmative action and the abolition of discrimination is a constant battle in India. An example of this can be seen in Delhi university, where the professors opposed the introductions of quotas, even though it is a constitutional provision. As a result of this, the reservations were introduced as late as 1996. Delhi university also opposed the employment quotas. The Xaxa reports in 2002 highlighted that, out of 700 lecturers in postgraduate departments, only 7 of these were Dalits. Also, out of 4512 teachers in affiliated under-graduate colleges, 11 of them were SCs (Xaxa, 2002). Non-teaching posts in Delhi university conform to the typical pattern that can be seen all over India: the higher the representation of SC, the lower paying the job. It is common that menial and low paying jobs are most often performed almost exclusively by Dalits and low-caste (Deshpande, 2013, p.90).

Deshpande also raises the interesting point that, in all of the opposition to affirmative action, there is never a protest against over-representation of low caste in low paying jobs. This leaves the impression

that, as long as Dalits do not compete for the traditional upper-caste jobs, then it is considered acceptable (Deshpande, 2013, p.90). In 2006, Delhi University set up an 'equal opportunity cell', focussed towards physical access for disabled students and 'the implementation of affirmative action towards SC, ST and O.B.C.'. However, no activities in the last three years have indicated any specific attempts to ensure the enforcement of affirmative action (Deshpande, 2013, p.90). Since then, the university have now changed their equal opportunity cell to focus on the issues related to students belonging to SC, ST and O.B.C. and disabled students on a continual basis (Delhi University, 2017). There are also constant barriers being displayed in employment, in regards to quotas. Guhan points out that these procedures include temporary positions given to Dalits, so they can easily be taken away, and eliminations via personal evaluation procedures (Guhan, 2001, p.213).

As common as the arguments against affirmative action are, it is important to note that these arguments are not always accurate. There have been cases of non-Dalits fighting for equal rights for all caste members, particularly in education. They have argued that the answer lies not with abandoning reservations, but increasing efforts to address the educational inequality that occurs at a much younger age (as discussed earlier). They believe that unless there is a huge commitment to improving the primary school education, India cannot expect reservations to succeed (Deshpande, 2013, p.121).

A further reason why Dalits need the higher education that affirmative action provides is because it gives them a 'voice'. "It allows them to go to the centre of society, where they can meet other people and get a platform," (Deshpande and Newman, 2007). Deshpande also highlights that:

the silence imposed by marginality, caste prejudice and poverty is broken by introducing these dalit students to another world and a different future. These opportunities promote social mobility because reservations literally rescue Dalits from a lifetime of exploitation at the hands of landlords, employers and neighbours who can turn on them without provocation and remind them forcefully of their subordinate status (2013, p.118).

This is a further argument for how some believe that only true change will occur when Dalits find their own voices and, although they need to have a platform provided for them to speak for themselves, the inner fight for equality still needs to come from dalit activism in order for discrimination to truly be dealt with. All of these arguments and criticisms of affirmative action are showing that affirmative action is not enough on its own.

Affirmative action quotas

A difference that can be seen between affirmative action in India and the U.S. is the focus on quotas. In India, affirmative action is implemented by way of quotas in higher education and employment sectors. Sheth argued that these quotas were moderately successful due to the Mandal Commission, as it created the space for a greater assertion of dalit activism, which consequently resulted in better implementation of quotas and reservations (Sheth, 2004, p.13). The increase of SC in class 1 jobs is evident; in 1964, only 1.6% were held by SC, but by the end of 2004 it had risen to 12.2% (Deshpande, 2013, p.87). But, on further investigation, it is the quotas and reservations that are criticised and seen as the reason why affirmative action will never work. Deshpande highlights how quotas can be criticised for failing to promote equality, as by reserving for one set of people, that space is denied to others:

Quotas are widely seen as unfair, and are condemned for punishing innocent upper castes for the damage done in the past, and for reinforcing caste lines rather than striving for a caste-free society, and for exempting Dalits from the rigours of market competition. Critics argue that reservations replace one form of discrimination (against Dalits) with another, equally pernicious form (against non-quota students and workers). (2013, p.115)

However, there are other scholars who completely disagree with this reasoning. Shaw believes that people fight to eliminate affirmative action because it removes the advantages they are used to having: “Only because they stand to gain so much from past discrimination do they stand to lose from affirmative action,” (Shaw, 1988, p.766). It is felt that these people would rather continue

discriminating against Dalits, for fear of losing out on a privilege that they may not necessarily should have had in the first place. If India was completely equal in all aspects, then any privileges would have to be earned, and the opportunities to earn those privileges would be open to all e.g. higher wages when promoted.

Affirmative action and Hinduism

One impact on affirmative action that must be looked at is religion. As this thesis is focussed on the treatment of Hindu Dalits in India, the role of Hinduism in India and how it affects society must be examined. Thiemann (1996) has argued that religion should be kept separate from ideas of freedom and equality, as it can cause more problems and draws society away from reason. In India, it is impossible to do this when discussing society, as it is built upon the Hindu hierarchy of the caste system. As this is the case, could it ever be possible for affirmative action to be successful?

Affirmative action is aimed at bridging the gaps between different people, which distances from traditional caste thinking of a hierarchical structure to society. Unlike typically western views, Hindus do not traditionally believe in the equality of all people, and the idea of pollution from Dalits is heavily entrenched.

Sharma has attempted to address this issue. Sharma argues that not only can Hinduism fit side by side with affirmative action, but can also be used as an argument for affirmative action (Sharma, 2005, p.47). His argument begins by exploring the Hindu notion of karma and rebirth, and examining whether affirmative action could be argued as a result of good karma, by remaining faithful to their religion even when they are being discriminated against (Sharma, 2005, p.49). The problem with this argument is that karma affects everyone; stating that Dalits deserve to be given reservations is implying that the higher castes deserve to have these places taken from them, which further implies that the higher castes have bad karma. Equally, karma is an individualistic design. If a Hindu created good karma for his/herself in their lifetime, it will lead to a better rebirth in the next life. Affirmative action is focussed on rights of a particular group of people, not one person individually. In this way, karma and affirmative action do not work together.

On the other hand, as karma is linked to rebirth, it could be used to answer the question of why should someone be compensated for how their ancestors suffered? Since untouchability has been outlawed in India, many argue that dalit discrimination does not exist, and is a thing of the past. But, when linked to karma, it could be argued that these people deserve to be compensated because they are the same people that were discriminated against in a previous life. In this way, the compensation through affirmative action could be construed as the consequence of good karma. However, the problem with this argument is that karma could be used to justify almost anything in this sense. Hindus that discriminate against Dalits could argue that it is karma for their poor actions in a previous life, and now they are being punished for those actions. Therefore, perhaps karma is too vague an idea to be used to justify discrimination or affirmative action. Sharma's arguments show that karma and rebirth can perhaps serve as a religious resource for affirmative action, albeit a weak argument in itself, but it is not a strong enough argument on its own for affirmative action (Sharma, 2005, p.59).

Sharma moves on to discuss how the Upanishads can be used to back up arguments for affirmative action. In the Isha Upanishad it stated that "The Lord is enshrined in the hearts of all. The Lord is the supreme reality. Rejoice in him through renunciation. Covet nothing," (The Upanishads, 1987, p.208). Sharma believed this justifies affirmative action as enjoyment and success in life does not come from holding on to things that belong to others. By this, Sharma is referring to how Dalits are forbidden from having access to certain things such as water, and not being allowed to have equal opportunities in jobs and education. Whilst people argue that scheduled castes and other backward classes are being provided more opportunities than ever before, Sharma responds that it also goes hand in hand with the upper castes having better opportunities of study and employment than ever before. Sharma states this in conjunction with his previous quotes of not coveting what belongs to others and finding enjoyment in renunciation. For upper castes to find joy, he argues they should renounce their claim to every job and educational opportunity, as they are not giving up anything when allowing Dalits to have reservations. He also believes that, whilst dalit opportunities may be getting stronger, the higher castes still hold the majority of the power and opportunities, and are not giving up anything. This argument

is not particularly accurate; with reservations negating the concept of “equal opportunity”, as seats are only reserved for certain castes, it can not be adequately argued that upper castes have more opportunities than ever before. Although, both the arguments for and against affirmative action are missing the most fundamental problem. Whether upper castes have more rights than scheduled castes or vice versa, neither one of those scenarios are preventing discrimination as it is not providing an equal playing field for all parties involved. This is the issue that affirmative action cannot be used to resolve. In this case, the only logical way to develop an equal playing field is to eradicate the Hindu caste system all together, as it will always be a hierarchical system.

Sharma argues that the quote above could be used as an admission of wrong doing on one hand and modification of behaviour on the other, which establishes a connection between the past, present and future. The quote does this in three separate parts: “The Lord is enshrined in the hearts of all. The lord is the supreme Reality,” could be explaining that whilst things constantly change and evolve, everything is a part of God and therefore is connected. “Rejoice in him through renunciation” could be discussing that you find peace and happiness when you admit your wrongdoings and renounce them, and “covet nothing” is speaking about sharing what exists, rather than labelling it as ‘yours’ and ‘mine’. This argument also has flaws in it; It is no longer enough to apologise for the past and, unfortunately, the past can never be resolved. The sole focus of affirmative action should be finding a way to bridge the gap between treatments of the different castes in India.

One of the issues with arguments for and against affirmative action is that, for the majority of cases, both parties are only seeing how the issue affects them. Dalits see affirmative action as a good thing, in the sense that it is allowing them opportunities they wouldn’t have previously had, but also acknowledge that it further isolates them as separate and ‘untouchable’, as can be seen in the various examples earlier in this chapter. Higher castes see affirmative action as a deprivation of job and education opportunities for them, in order to allow lower castes those opportunities. Indian religious teachings could be used to encourage people to take a step back and see things from a perspective other than their own. Radhakrishnan points out that a common Hindu view is to “sacrifice your

personal interests for the family, or the family for the community, of the community for the country of the country for the world,” (Radhakrishnan, 1927, p.90). Obviously, this is not always the case.

Affirmative action is also opposed on the grounds that it is ineffective and doesn't deal with the root of the problem, as can be seen throughout this chapter. On the other hand, affirmative action has been supported by some high caste out of a sense of social justice, even though they will gain nothing from it.

The argument of affirmative action and religion naturally brings forth the many disputes between Ambedkar and Gandhi, over whether Dalits will ever hold an equal place in Indian society. Ambedkar was a dalit political leader and very firmly believed that Hinduism would never allow Dalits to hold an equal place in society. For Ambedkar, all castes including *Śūdras* were enemies to Dalits, because they were part of the caste system and practiced Brahmin ideology (Kumar, 2000, p. 3978).

Ambedkar fought for the idea that in order to destroy the caste system and discrimination that comes with it, Dalits had to unite and oppose the varna system and all of the castes. Gandhi, however, held slightly different views. Whilst he also disagreed with the discrimination against 'Harijans' or Dalits, he believed that it could be reconciled whilst still maintaining traditional Hindu values in the caste system. He believed that the true prize would be given to Harijans if they persevered with Hinduism until untouchability is destroyed: “if untouchability is destroyed root and branch and Hinduism lives, the future historian will assign the place of honour to Harijans who will have stood by their faith in spite of heartless persecutions by their fellows,” (Gandhi, cited in Sharma, 2005, pp.79-80). Gandhi spoke about how, in the beginning, affirmative action was based around rights to enter and worship at temples. “Temple entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the untouchables and assure them that they are not outcasts before God. Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us and made us the pariahs of the empire,” (Gandhi, 1958, p.290). This shows that the initial goal of affirmative action, to bridge the gap in society between high castes and Dalits and to make society equal in all aspects, has been lost amongst arguments for quotas and education.

Although the issue of temple entry is still an important topic, A.A. does not solve this problem. It deals with Dalits having less chances in education and employment, but it does not attempt to fix the deep rooted societal inequalities. Whilst education and employment are important, one of the worst aspects of untouchability is the limitation it places upon a religious person's rights to exercise their own religion. Gandhi is pointing out that untouchability has made fellow Hindus outcasts of their own faith, and that is something that needs to be addressed. Whilst not casting judgement on the strengths or weaknesses of affirmative action policies, he has admitted that something needs to be done to correct the unfairness of untouchability.

Affirmative action in everyday life

It is important to look at Indian communities and the practicality of A.A. in everyday life. Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that one of the reasons affirmative action often fails is because Indian society is not united in wanting it to work. This is not only the case in India. In the U.S. there have been policies in place that enforce affirmative action and when people do not follow these, there can be legal consequences. Disalvo and Ceasar (2004) discussed how, in the U.S., businesses pretended to draw up charts and planning, in order to avoid legal action, not because they wanted to aid the fight for equality (Disalvo, 2004, p.80). If it is the case that people in the U.S. are only following affirmative action when threatened by legal action, then how can the Indian government expect people to follow A.A.? There are no policies for monitoring quotas and affirmative action, and there are no repercussions if these quotas are not met. This can be seen by the suggestions of The Hague institute for global justice. The institute believes that monitoring systems are needed to reassess affirmative action and to allow for adjusting policies to meet current needs. It is believed that evidence-based research is needed to regularly review the impact of caste-based development tools. This research could identify shortcomings and optimise affirmative action. On a larger scale, the institute for global justice also proposes an international platform to share-best practices across different countries, in order to learn from past experiences (Appiah, 2015).

However, looking at the current disputes and riots over quotas and reservations, it is unlikely that A.A. will ever be effective, even if the policies were monitored. If the law of untouchability is not enforced by local authorities, as can be seen in cases where police have discarded cases of Dalits being mistreated, then it is not likely that all local authorities and governments would effectively follow affirmative action monitoring schemes. It is difficult to see how affirmative action will ever be successful, when evidence suggests that many citizens do not want it to be successful, and need to be threatened in order for policies to be followed. What must be taken into account though, is that some Hindus view the caste hierarchy as a fundamental principle of Hinduism, and therefore, it is not a natural instinct for Indian society to accommodate both the equality that affirmative action is trying to create and the natural principles that their daily lives work towards. This is effectively asking them to constantly contradict their own beliefs, which is what makes the fight for affirmative action in India so difficult.

It has been argued that the reason that A.A. is not strong enough to prevent discrimination against Dalits is because the government do not really wish for the discrimination to end. Many people believe that affirmative action is there to give the illusion that the Indian government are promoting equality when, in reality, they are content with the Hindu caste system as it already stands. There is evidence to support this notion. Galanter showed that budgets supposedly allocated to benefit the disadvantaged in education and employment remain unutilized (Galanter, 1984, p.96). Also, reservations were originally created to be in proportion to the minorities' presence in the population. However, though the population of minority groups has naturally increased over time, the quotas have remained the same (Jayal, 2014, p.119). The fact that Dalits in rural areas are still vulnerable, despite untouchability being outlawed over fifty years ago, could be argued as an indication that the government is not overly interested in abolishing discrimination. Shah (2006) highlighted in a survey of 565 villages in eleven Indian states found untouchability is still practised in 80% of these villages. Research showed that Dalits were subjected to violence and exploitation, and were dominant among the manual labours that earned the lowest wages. Dalits also had typically higher poverty levels than people belonging to upper castes (Shah, 2006, p. 64). It can be argued it is difficult for India to hold

one unanimous opinion to stop all discrimination, as many consider caste hierarchy to lie at the heart of Hinduism. So, it becomes increasingly difficult for the eradication of discrimination to ever be achievable, if different areas of society, such as the government and local level authorities, are not united in their viewpoints. There are many regional variations with the effectiveness of affirmative action policies. An example of this can be seen in Rajasthan, where the Grijesh Dinker (the state co-ordinator of national dalit movement for justice) explained a situation that involved two 8-year-old dalit students drinking from a teacher's water pot. Those students were caught, beaten and as punishment, they and eleven other dalit students were expelled. The act of expelling the other nine students not involved in the incident cannot be justified by any means, and was simply the product of dalit discrimination; the school expelled them because they had the power to do so. This case was taken to the national level by Dinker, but the police investigation was closed down. This is further evidence that there are many people within the government and in local authority that are not truly interested in making a change to these inequalities (Coudere, 2016).

Affirmative Action and human rights

Despite these issues, equality still needs to be given to Dalits. Regardless of government or religious beliefs, it is a key element of human rights. Although not legally binding, the human rights act is considered universal, and was created by the United Nations to protect a human being's inherent rights. India is part of the U.N and therefore, human rights need to be considered. The first and arguably the most important section of the universal declaration of human rights reads as follows: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (United Nations, 1948) Whilst it can be argued that human rights are not universal because they are a western value being placed on an eastern culture, and traditional Brahmanical Hinduism does not believe that all humans are born equal, it should also be noted that India was one of the 48 countries that voted in favour of this declaration. It can be reasonably argued that untouchability in India is a violation of the universal declaration of human rights.

Although it is legally outlawed in India, untouchability discrimination still occurs on a daily basis, particularly in the rural areas. In most villages in Rajasthan, Dalits are forbidden to draw water from the public well, as they are seen to pollute it (Coudere, 2016). They are also segregated to one area of the village away from the rest of the community. The National crime records bureau [N.C.R.B.] announced that crimes against Dalits increased by 29% from 2012-2014. In 2014 alone, 47,064 crimes against Dalits were registered (Jain, 2015). That amounts to 128 cases each day. These statistics show that affirmative action and outlawing untouchability has not been enough to stop discrimination from occurring. This brings forth the question of what else is necessary to prevent discrimination in India? The aspects that are most needed are the ones that are currently absent in Hindu society: a united wish to end discrimination by the higher castes and society in general, and a stronger fight from the Dalits themselves to assert their equal rights.

How can the issues be overcome?

From the arguments made in this chapter, it is clear to see that A.A. is not enough on its own, due to the failure to implement it successfully and the response it has received from the rest of the Indian population. The case of discrimination still needs to be addressed though, which leads to further exploration of what other ways Dalits can help themselves outside of government quotas. Whether or not the Indian government does or does not want to eliminate discrimination, if equality is something that the Dalits wish to have then, to a certain degree, it falls on their shoulders to obtain. It will never be an easy task; Dalits are often stuck in the vicious cycle of oppression. In this sense, the cycle consists of Dalits being constantly reminded that they are polluted and worthless by upper castes, to the point where Dalits start believing that this is true. Then, because they believe it to be true, the rest of Indian society can argue that there is no point in giving Dalits special privileges, as they themselves feel undeserving.

Evidence of Dalits believing that they are polluted can be seen in a video documentary 'India Untouched'. In this video, the dalit states that people cannot touch them "because they will get polluted. This is how the world is," (Sagittarii, 2013). In order to break this cycle, Dalits need to find

and fight for their own self-worth, emphasising Ambedkar's argument that Dalits should stand united and proud of their identity. This is particularly difficult for Dalits to accomplish though, when they often receive harsher punishments for standing up for their rights. When looking at the rise of crimes against Dalits earlier in this chapter, the article argued that the reason these crimes have increased is because Dalits are speaking out about these crimes (Courdere, 2016). This could be read as either the crimes have always been at such a high number, but many Dalits were too scared to come forward and record these crimes, or it could be suggesting that as Dalits are coming forward and recording these crimes they, and other Dalits, are being punished as a result.

All of these points lead to the solution that, whilst dalit activism and affirmative action may not be enough on their own, they might be enough when working together. As the next chapter explores religious conversion as a means of dalit activism and the success and weaknesses that have occurred, it needs to be understood as one piece of a puzzle. When all of the pieces -- affirmative action, dalit activism, and the will of Hindu society -- are working harmoniously towards the common goal of eradicating untouchability completely, only then will India succeed in creating an equal society. A good analogy of this lies in the Bhagavad Gita, in chapter 3 verses 14-16, when discussing the dharmachakra:

All living bodies subsist on food grains, which are produced from rains. Rains are produced by performance of yajña [sacrifice], and yajña is born of prescribed duties. Regulated activities are prescribed in the Vedas, and the Vedas are directly manifested from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Consequently, the all-pervading Transcendence is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice. My dear Arjuna, one who does not follow in human life the cycle of sacrifice thus established by the Vedas certainly leads a life full of sin. Living only for the satisfaction of the senses, such a person lives in vain. (Prabhupāda, 2016, pp.152-155)

Whilst the wheel of dharma is focussed on a Hindu's duty in life, the analogy of the wheel serves to show that it is only successful when all of the sections of the wheel are working together. If the reins were removed, for example, the wheel of dharma would no longer work. The same principle applies

to eliminating untouchability. In the past, this argument has often been used in support of the varna system, and how everyone needs to perform their prescribed duties to ensure communal harmony. Unfortunately, arguments in this chapter have shown that it is no longer realistic to believe the untouchability will ever be truly eradicated, so long as the varna and caste systems are still a part of Hindu society. To have true equality it must be accepted and understood that every person is equally important. India no longer needs to distinguish people by high caste and dalit, but instead by the strengths and skills that each individual possesses. Everyone should be treated with equal respect. The Vedic story of the sacrifice of the cosmic man have also been used to understand the caste system: “The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vaishya, from his feet the Śūdra was produced” (Benares, 1892). This is also continuing the idea that high caste people belong above low caste people, and needs to be eradicated. Even if it is suggesting that the brahmins need the ‘feet’ (Dalits), it is equally stating that Dalits lives are severely restricted by the movements of the ‘other parts of the body’. For discrimination to truly be over, everyone needs to stand side by side, not on top of each other.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that affirmative action is one of several class-based policies designed to overcome discrimination. A.A. has a clear weakness in identifying who is/isn’t eligible for reservation quotas, as can be seen in both India and the U.S. This lack of definitive guidelines has caused communities to fight for a ‘minority’ status, in order to gain access to the reservations, and violence occurs when these labels are denied. At the same time, the label of ‘minority’ is causing further discrimination against Dalits and increasing caste divisions. Evidence of this was shown earlier in this chapter, where Dalits often hid their identity due to fear. Sociologist Sambriddhi Kharel explains that discriminatory attitudes have resulted in “even the politically conscious, militant Dalit activists walking around with two visiting cards, one with a Dalit surname and the other with a non-Dalit one,” (Pun,2014). The minority label has led Dalits to face accusations of being incompetent and unworthy of their places in higher education and higher paying jobs, with the insinuation that they would not be intelligent enough to gain access to these opportunities without the help of reservations. Suggestions

of ways to improve the implementation of government quotas have been made, such as employing monitoring systems and providing stricter guidelines for eligibility.

However, this chapter has shown that affirmative action is not helping to prevent the true problem of discrimination. The weaknesses shown in both India and U.S. affirmative action policies serve to show that equality is not necessarily easier to obtain in western society than eastern society. The success of A.A. policies rely on a united desire to end discrimination, shown through the U.S. government applying monitoring policies to ensure the continuation of equal opportunities for all. Caste discrimination is continuing to exist in India due to the lack of equality in education and, most importantly, due to the entrenched societal views of hierarchy and impurity. By providing Dalits with access to government employment and higher education without dealing with the deep-rooted beliefs that Dalits are not worthy of anything, all A.A. serves to accomplish is a deeper divide between caste communities and an increase in discrimination against Dalits. Although A.A. has been shown to provide a platform and a voice for Dalits to fight for equality, this platform would not be needed if India fought the true issues that are continuing caste discrimination. Much evidence in this chapter has suggested that a continuation of discrimination is what many Indian citizens want. Higher castes have tried to accuse A.A. policies of 'reverse discrimination', as a means to eradicate affirmative action and allow caste discrimination to continue. The government has also shown they are not overly concerned with the eradication of caste discrimination, due to their unutilized budgets for Dalits and the lack of implementation procedures. This shows that affirmative action is being used as a cloak, so the government can appear to be targeting the problems that Dalits face, but in reality, the government is not dealing with the deep-rooted societal inequalities brought upon by caste beliefs. All the points made in this chapter points to the fact that it would not matter if A.A. was perfectly implemented, if Indian society still considered Dalits to be polluted and beneath them. It is the caste system hierarchical beliefs that need to be changed or eradicated from Hindu society, and the implementation of a completely equal education system for all that taught the equality of every individual, that will end caste-based discrimination in India.

Chapter Two:

Dalit conversion as a response to Caste-Based Social Injustice

The previous chapter focussed on various ways in which the government is working towards social equality, and the issues and complexities that it entails. This chapter is concerned with how Dalits themselves are combatting caste-based discrimination, as all areas of Indian society need to be working towards a common goal of eradicating social inequality, in order for the situation to change for the better. Conversion in India is an extremely complex issue. Many Dalits are converting as a means of escaping the entrenched caste system in India, and this chapter will focus on the success (or failure) of these transitions, and how effective it is as a means of combatting dalit discrimination. Dalits have converted to many religions over the decades, such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism and Sikhism. This section will focus on the dalit conversions to both Buddhism and Christianity, and how they have been met with very different reactions within Hindu society. It will analyse the successfulness of conversion to each religion as a response to caste-based social injustice. This section will then conclude with a comparison of the strength of conversion against the strengths of affirmative action as a means of combatting dalit exploitation and discrimination.

Buddhism

This section will focus on the dalit conversions to Buddhism. It will explore the history of Dalits searching for an identity under Ambedkar's leadership, and how Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism has helped encourage the Dalits to fight caste discrimination. It will examine how conversion to Buddhism has been used as a political protest for many Dalits, and how variations of Buddhist worship can be seen throughout Neo-Buddhist communities. Ultimately, this section will analyse how successful Buddhist conversion has been in combatting caste-based discrimination for Dalits.

Buddhism as identity

Dalits have been fighting for equal rights within Indian society for centuries, but the largest cases of dalit conversion occurred after the establishment of India's independence. It was during these highly significant political times that Dalits laid claim to being a minority nation. In a scheduled caste political conference in Allahabad, December 1942, it was argued that "India was not a nation but a constellation of nations," (Bandhopadhyay, 2000, p.903). Ambedkar was the front-man of the dalit debates, arguing that besides the Hindus and Muslims, the scheduled castes are a necessary third party in India. For Ambedkar, Dalits were "no part of the Hindu community but constituted a different nation," (Bandhopadhyay, 2000, p.906). By using the term nation, Ambedkar was arguing that there are a large number of Dalits, that Hindus do not treat as a welcome part of their own community, and yet they will not allow Dalits to have their own community and separate rights. Ambedkar had always held the belief that all Dalits and other minorities should unite and fight against the discrimination and exploitation that they have always received (Bhartiya, 2008, p.49).

The dalit population is spread out widely over the entirety of India, and although they share the land with higher castes, the entire country runs in a hierarchical manner. This shows that, although India established a formal democracy, a sense of colonialization still exists. This internal colonialism creates a problem for Dalits because there is no physical escape for them. It is ingrained in every aspect of their lives. They have no independent territory that they can retreat to and, unlike the British in India, they are unable to 'send home' their colonisers. However, it could be argued that it is difficult for Dalits to lay claim to an independent history and culture. The truth is they are Indian citizens, born into the Indian hierarchy. They have only gained their distinctiveness as untouchables from the discrimination they have faced at the hands of Hindu society. In a sense, Dalits are caught in the bind of being Hindus and non-Hindus at the same time (Pandey, 2006, p.1781).

As they are unable to leave India or claim an independent history, Dalits use whatever means they can to gain equal rights alongside their colonisers. One of their methods of doing so is to convert to a religion outside of Hinduism. Buddhism is a popular choice because it is still considered to be an

“Indian” religion. Ambedkar, the forefather of this movement, believed that the “surest means of assuring progress and the greatest of the country, was to embrace the faith of the Buddha and its fundamental principles- liberty, equality and fraternity.” He wrote that “Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set out in the preamble to the constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal in their religion denies them. I have to do the work of conversion,” (Ambedkar, 2003, p. 503). For Ambedkar and other dalit leaders this wasn’t just a conversion to Buddhism; this was a conversion for the future, which would contribute to the social, political and economic uplift of the Dalits. They were looking for a religion of equality, with compassion and understanding. Ambedkar found this in Buddhism.

Ambedkar’s Buddhism

The majority of dalit conversions to Buddhism have occurred since Ambedkar’s conversion in 1956, which suggests Ambedkar was the driving force or influence over the Dalits. He publicly converted to Buddhism on the 14th October, 1956, at Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur. His conversion was unique in the sense that, after he took the traditional three refuges and five precepts from a Buddhist monk, more than 500,000 of his followers converted with him (Bardia, 2009, p.737).

Interestingly, Ambedkar interpreted Buddhism slightly differently from traditional Buddhism in a number of ways. As Dalits converted to Buddhism following Ambedkar’s lead, it is likely that the majority of converts follow Ambedkar’s interpretation. This is why dalit converts are referred to as Neo-Buddhists or Navayanan Buddhists. Navayana translates as ‘new vehicle’, which is a comparison of Mahayana, ‘great vehicle’. Therefore, Navayanan Buddhism is the new vehicle of Buddhism.

Dr. Ambedkar emphasised the rationality of Buddhism: “Buddhism is nothing if not rationalism, and Buddhism is the method of rational investigation embodied,” (Ambedkar, 1957, p.175). When he converted, he rationalised Buddhism and illustrated it in such a way as to show there is a religion that celebrates equality and does not rely on a supernatural being in order to find peace. In this way, Ambedkar is a primary example of a ‘Buddhist Modernist’, as described by Macmahan (Macmahan, 2008).

Ambedkar argues that the Buddha rejected four vital theses of Hindu Brahmanic philosophy: 1) Sanctity and infallibility of the Vedas, 2) Salvation of the soul or escape from transmigration by performing Vedic sacrifices, 3) fourfold division of castes by birth and occupation as blueprint for ideal society, 4) Karma in previous lives to account for one's present state. Ambedkar read these rejections as the Buddha's desire to base his teachings in the domain of Earth and humans (Ganguly, 2004, p.56). This is a rather contentious interpretation of Buddhist teachings. For example, Buddhist teachings do not reject karma and rebirth, as point four suggests, but explicitly accept both of these ideas. Whilst the Buddha taught, in the Pali Canon, that not everything in life is the result of good and bad actions, as natural events have an effect too, Buddhists do believe that their good or bad actions and intentions have an impact on their current and future lives.: "I am the owner of my karma. I inherit my karma. I am born of my karma. I am related to my karma. I live supported by my karma. Whatever karma I create, whether good or evil, that I shall inherit," (Anguttara Nikaya, V.57). Good karma can lead to rebirth in a heavenly realm, for example. Karma is part of the cycle that Buddhists believe to be stuck in until detachment has been learned; only then can Buddhists escape the cycle of rebirth. This idea is explained in the four noble truths: "To give oneself up to indulgence is sensual pleasure, give oneself up to Self-mortification, the painful, unholy, unprofitable; both these two extremes the Perfect One has avoided and found out the Middle path which makes one both to see and to know, which leads to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment, to Nibbana," (Baruah, 2000, p.121). An example of Buddhists believing in karma can be seen in Tibetan prayer wheels. As these wheels are turned, the prayers are sent out into the universe, spreading good karma.

Ambedkar formed his own interpretations from Buddhist ideas. He reinterpreted Dukkha, the central Buddhist notion of suffering and sorrow. In traditional Buddhism, the root cause of suffering is attachment that results from desires. Tanha, a type of desire that is often translated as craving, is thought to result in attachment. This is the second of the four noble truths. When a Buddhist detaches themselves from desire and therefore suffering, then they can find nirvana. Ambedkar believed that the recognition of suffering is the real basis of religion (Karunyakara, 2002, p.68). This suffering in

life is brought on by social and economic injustice; misery is the result of man's inequality to man. The only way to end that suffering is to take away the inequality which, in Ambedkar's mind, was purely caused by the Hindu caste system. Ambedkar also formulated his sense of Dhamma, which is the guiding principle of social conscience. He believed that to maintain purity of life and reach perfection in life, one must give up craving and the belief of karma as rebirth, and believe that karma is the instrument of moral order, as one's actions in this life have consequences in this life for oneself and others (Karunyakara, 2002, p.97). For Ambedkar, belief in God and the soul is against dhamma. Omvedt explained Ambedkar's view as an extremely social interpretation, identifying it with social-economic exploitation. She explains that "with this, the goal of action becomes not only the liberation of the individual seeker, but the transformation of the world," (Omvedt, 2003, p.277). This shows Ambedkar's Buddhism to be an example of socially engaged Buddhism. Macmahan describes social engagement as a common characteristic among Buddhist modernists (Macmahan, 2008, p.253).

Ambedkar realised that religion works as both a social and motivational force. Buddhism is a motivational force as it inspires individuals to act upon an event, withstand difficulties and accept failures with a sense of detachment. It is a social force as it gives the dalit community an identity that isn't focussed on discrimination. Ambedkar's Buddhism has given the Dalits a sense of social security.

Ambedkar was very keen to dismiss the idea of God and the soul. Valerian Rodrigues and Gauri Vishwanathan point out that Ambedkar's foregrounding of Buddha's atheism has been seen as evidence of Ambedkar's desire to transcend religiosity and seek recourse in modern institutions and practices of democracy and governance (Rodrigues, 1993, p.315). This is partly true; Ambedkar used Buddhism to show Dalits a modern and rational way of thinking that was separate from the Hindu notions of caste and hierarchy. However, it's not entirely true that Ambedkar desired to transcend religiosity. Whilst he was avoiding the supernatural elements of Hinduism, which explains his rejection of God, he was very much focussed on finding a religion and a faith that he could believe in.

He found that in Buddhism. It accepted everyone as equal and Ambedkar felt that Buddhism eliminated the problems he could see within India society.

Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism was unveiled by the publication of Ambedkar's rewriting of the life of the Buddha and his principle beliefs in *The Buddha and his Dharma* in 1957. This work has served as the foundational religious text for dalit Buddhists (Ganguly, 2004, p.50). Within this work it could be clearly seen that Ambedkar was interpreting Buddhism as an ideology that responded best to the need of modern India. Jayashree Gokhale- Turner read Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in terms of 'liberation theology': "seen as an inalienable aspect of the experience of coming into modernity among the oppressed around the world," (Turner, 1981, p.37). Dalit writers, who wish to sever connections with Indian traditions, have interpreted Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism as symbolising a total break from non-modern ways of engaging with the world (Ganguly, 2004, p.53). This is referring to Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism as a tool for equality and separation for Dalits.

Ambedkar's insistence on Dalits converting to Buddhism came as a last resort, as he initially sought to reform Hinduism in such a way that Dalits could be free from discrimination without converting. In section 24 of his speech 'Annihilation of Caste', he explained a possible reformation that centred around the changes to Brahmins. He argued for a singular, standard Hindu holy book, that was available and recognised by all Hindus. He believed that all other Hindu holy books should be discarded by law. In an ideal world for Ambedkar, he believed in the abolition of all priests. However, he relented that priesthood could remain if it was no longer hereditary, and anybody could be eligible to become a priest, providing they could pass an exam. He finally suggested that the number of priests in India should be limited, and insisted that all priests should be viewed as servants of the state and subject to disciplinary action (Ambedkar, 2016, p.308). It is clear from these reformation suggestions that Ambedkar viewed Hindu priests to be main cause of caste discrimination in India:

The whole thing is abominable, and is due to the fact that the priestly class among Hindus is subject neither to law nor to morality. It recognises no duties. It knows only of rights and

privileges. It is a pest which divinity seems to have let loose on the masses for their mental and moral degradation... It will certainly help to kill Brahminism and will also help to kill caste, which is nothing but Brahminism incarnate. Brahminism is the poison which has spoiled Hinduism (Ambedkar, 2016, p.310).

The reform of the Hindu caste system never came to fruition, which is why Ambedkar felt that Dalits would never be free from oppression: “unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man’s life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self too,” (Ambedkar, quoted in David, 2013, p.57).

Whilst Ambedkar interpreted Buddhism in a rather rationalist, modernist way that supports his social and political activism, that does not mean that he wasn’t fully committed to Buddhism and to the conversion of Dalits. Religion is always subject to interpretation and evolution, and Neo-Buddhists have developed their own version of Buddhism that allows them freedom from caste discrimination whilst encompassing methods of devotion that they are used to.

Vidhu Verma argued that Ambedkar weakened Buddhism by interpreting it in his own way: “by spending considerable energy exploring key conceptions in Buddhism, Ambedkar leaves us wondering how helpful Buddhism is if the terminology is so open to interpretation.” (Verma, 1999, p.2809). However, this is not a strong argument as religions continuously evolve and are interpreted by followers in different ways. Buddhism is an extremely diverse religion, with many schools and traditions that continue to evolve.

Neo-Buddhist worship

In this previous section, Ambedkar’s rejection of God and worshipping God-heads could be clearly seen. After his conversion, he performed the dhamma diksha ceremony to the new converts, which included twenty-two vows that he made to his followers. One of these vows stated “I shall not

perform Shraddha nor shall I give pind,” (Omvedt, 2003, p.261). These are both ceremonies in which Hindu worshippers traditionally pay homage to their ancestors. Ambedkar was also against the worshipping of idols: “I am no worshipper of idols, I believe in breaking them,” (Ambedkar, 1943). Ambedkar was against the worshipping of idols and God as he believed in the rationality of religion, and the rights of Dalits to be able to live without fear of deities and hierarchy, albeit hierarchy between caste or the hierarchy of humans and god-figures.

Omvedt argued that Ambedkar’s rejection of Hindu modes of worship has had a reverse effect, in the sense that it has given Dalits a reason to view Ambedkar as the replacement object of worship: “Dalits embracing Buddhism could get very caught up in other forms of superstition; very often Ambedkar’s very rationalism seems simply to have left ground for re-entry of superstition centred around Ambedkar himself, the king (God) of Dalits,” (Omvedt, 1994, p.249). Whilst it is true that there are idols and statues of Ambedkar in India, which will be discussed below, it may not necessarily be true that dalit converts are viewing him as a ‘God’. The reason for these statues could instead be viewed as a commemoration to the work Ambedkar did in support of the dalit movement, and as a reminder that they deserve to be treated with as many rights as those that belong to higher castes. In these instances, Ambedkar is looked up to as a teacher and their social leader, rather than their ‘God’.

These statues, that pay homage to Ambedkar and the work he performed, can be seen throughout India, in towns, cities, villages, at crossroads, railway stations and in parks. The first statue was created in 1962, and placed at the institute of science crossing in Mumbai (Tartakov, 2000, p.106). Another famous Ambedkar statue was created in 1984, placed by Kanshi Ram, the founder of the B.S.P. (Bahujan Samaj) political party (Pai, 2002, p.93). The B.S.P., as mentioned in other sections throughout this thesis, is the third largest national political party in India, which was formed mainly to represent scheduled tribes and caste. One of the largest statues is situated in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in the Ambedkar memorial park (Sinha, 2015).

These statues are important to Dalits as they represent the struggles that Dalits faced, and are another example of self-assertion of dalit rights. They do not only represent the gratitude that Dalits have towards Ambedkar and his mission for dalit equality, but it is also a reminder of how far they have come in terms of escaping caste discrimination and still how far they have to go in their mission for complete liberation. French Anthropologist Nicolas Jaoul wrote that, “In the context of poverty and illiteracy where they operate, such symbolic means have profound political implications, promoting ideals of citizenship and nationhood among the politically destitute where the state has partially failed,” (Jaoul, 2006, p.176).

Unfortunately, these statues have become the centre of controversies, particularly in the past few years. The statue of Ambedkar situated in the memorial park in Lucknow is G.O.I.ng to be joined with statues of other leaders, including those from upper castes. The states cabinet minister for backward classes welfare stated that: “we will install statues of all the great personalities who deserve honour, irrespective of their caste,” (Masoodi, 2017). Vivek Kumar, a professor at Jiwaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, has disagreed with this statement and believes that if the idea really is to create an egalitarian society, the approach of the government should be different: “Let every park and memorial of upper caste leaders all house a Dalit and O.B.C. icon. This is fascism to the hilt to dismantle the spaces of the subaltern classes... who have never had independent spaces of their own,” (Masoodi, 2017). Other examples of upper castes being unhappy about the statues can be seen all across India. In Tamil Nadu, the statues of Ambedkar have had to be placed in cages, as dominant castes have been desecrating them by garlanding them with slippers and cutting off their heads (Biswas, 2015).

Statues are not the only form of commemoration used by Neo-Buddhists. Important dates for Neo-Buddhists, such as Ambedkar’s birthday (April 14th), the Buddha’s birthday at the end of April, Ambedkars conversion day (October 14th) and the anniversary of Ambedkar’s death (December 6th) are all commemorated with Buddhist rituals. The celebration of Ambedkar’s birthday in Nana Rao Park is the most important public arena activity of each year, with a procession that travels through the whole of Kanpur (Jaoul, 2006, p.182). This suggests that many Neo-Buddhists view Ambedkar

with greater reverence than Buddha. This is likely due to the social message that Ambedkar spread and his importance in recent dalit history. In 2000, the Ravidas Julus procession floats showed atrocities inflicted on Dalits e.g. rape and murder. They also hung a banner showing guru Nanak, Ravidas, Ambedkar and Buddha side by side in a unified rejection of the caste system (Bellwinkel-Schempp, 2007, p. 2182).

Although Ambedkar rejected worship of Hindu deities, some Neo-Buddhists still continue to participate in Hindu religion activities. An example of this was given by Ganguly, who spoke about his family's maid who was a dalit Buddhist. Whilst Sushila (the maid) wished for typical Buddhist treatment in the form of a day's absence from work on the Birthday of the Buddha and Ambedkar, she also demanded special treatment and gifts during Hindu festivals as well. She partook in Hindu festivals and placed a Buddha statue in the family's prayer room, alongside the family's Hindu deities (Ganguly, 2004, p. 50). Sushila is a typical example of many dalit Buddhists in India, who signal the failure of the Ambedkarite conversion to a certain extent. Ambedkar's wish for Dalits to sever all ties with their Hindu past will be a very difficult thing to accomplish, particularly when Neo-Buddhists and Hindus live in the same villages etc as each other. Also, for many Buddhist converts, the importance of their conversion lays with their need to feel detachment from the exploitation suffered at the hands of the Hindu caste system. As Ambedkar's greatest desire was to free Dalits from discrimination, it cannot necessarily be argued that he has failed entirely. Dalit writer Shankarrao Khara expresses his feelings on what it means to convert: "I have accepted the Buddhist Dhamma. I am Buddhist now. I am not a Magar, nor an untouchable, nor even a Hindu... I have become independent. I am now free. I have now become a free citizen in independent India." (Zelliot, 1992, p.238) If Neo-Buddhists feel free from discrimination and happy to continue integrating and celebrating Hindu festivals as well as Buddhist celebrations, then they are forming their own interpretation of Ambedkar's Buddhist teachings and Ambedkar has, to a certain extent, achieved the dalit freedom that he was striving for.

Another example of the integration of Buddhism and Hindu modes of worship to the Neo-Buddhist life of dalit converts can be seen in Maharashtra, where the converts take part in Bhakti worship. Neo-Buddhists express their devotion to Ambedkar in the same manner as the Bhakti saint poets of medieval India expressed devotions to Hindu Gods. Ambedkar criticised Mahars' attempts of deriving inspiration from Chokhamela, the 14th century Bhakti poet. Twenty years before the community converted to Buddhism, Ambedkar also appealed to the Mahars to cast off labels that would remind them of patronage to the upper caste Hindus. (Ambedkar, 1930, P.103). It is interesting that Ambedkar did not approve of the Mahar's association with bhakti, particularly as the medieval bhakti poets were often very critical of caste. (Ganguly, 2004, p.58) This is likely to be one of the reasons why Mahar leaders took inspiration from the bhakti tradition. In the same way that Ambedkar fought for the freedom of Dalits, it is probable that some Mahar Dalits see bhakti as a resource for their fight for social justice. Despite these facts, the literary movement that emerged in Maharashtra following the conversion of the Mahar community in the late 1960s refused to trace its antecedents to the writings of Chokhamela (Ganguly, 2004, p.59).

However, the worship of Ambedkar and the Buddha in the bhakti mode is a common phenomenon, especially in rural Maharashtra. Whilst Ambedkar has given Dalits a sense of self-dignity and a self-reliant rejection of caste and inequality, this has not stopped them from participating in festivals and rituals. Temples have been built with images and idols of the Buddha and Ambedkar. Their birthdays are both treated as sacred days, and many devotional folk songs have been dedicated to Ambedkar and the Buddha. Indira Jhungare has collected many mahar folk songs that treat Ambedkar both as a personalised God and the supreme deity, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. (Jhungare, 1988, p.101) Most modes of worship are akin to those of bhakti and hence they do not signal a disjunction with the past as Ambedkar had hoped his Buddhism would do. However, like the statues of Ambedkar in India, these dalit modes of worship symbolise their struggle against discrimination, which Dalits continue to use as motivation for their fight for social injustice.

Conversion as a political protest

C. Lakshmanan, an associate professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies in Chennai wrote that “In India, conversion is a mode of protest and expressing dissatisfaction. It is both political and religious,” (Dore, 2016). Just as Indian politics are central to dalit rights in the form of reservations, they play an equally important role in a dalit’s choice to convert. This is particularly true of dalit conversions to Buddhism. It has been argued that Dalits use initiation into Buddhism as a gesture of protest. This can be seen in past instances in history, where each time the Dalit movement peaked, the number of conversions to Buddhism rose. Two examples of this are in 1956, after BR. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism, and in the 1980s, when the B.S.P. rose to prominence (Moudgil, 2017). Currently, 87% of the Buddhists population in India are neo- converts.

A very recent example of Dalits converting to Buddhism as a form of protest can be seen in May 2017, when 180 dalit families converted to Buddhism in the Saharanpur district, after Thakurs torched dalit houses and desecrated a Sant Ravidas temple. Thakurs are high-caste people, originally stemming from the *Kṣatriyas* (warrior) class in the varna system. The Dalits converts claimed to be protesting against the “unfair targeting of the community and Bhim army,” (Agarwali, 2017). These conversions occurred after several confrontations between Dalits, the Bhim army and Thakurs, which resulted in injuries on both sides. The Dalits believe that these were pre-planned attacks by the Thakurs against Dalits, as they happened when the men were out in the fields. This meant that it was the dalit women who were beaten. The Saharanpur Dalits have also claimed that they were prevented from installing an Ambedkar statue in their half of the village. Whilst these attacks were taking place, the local police failed to intervene, as they were targeting the Bhim army who they believed were triggering all of these violent protests. The Bhim army is a pro-dalit group that is working for dalit emancipation through education (Tiwari, 2017). It currently runs 350 free schools for Dalits in western Uttar Pradesh, and they are trying to register a ‘pan-India presence’ (Tiwari, 2017). They are a perfect example of dalit activism as a means of overcoming discrimination, and an organisation that works in harmony with all Dalits, converts or Hindu.

Although no repercussions were dealt to the Thakurs for burning the dalit houses, the Uttar Pradesh police announced a bounty of Rs 12,000 on Chandrashekhar, one of the Bhim army founders, for setting vehicles on fire after the incident took place (HindustanTimes, 2017). Chandrashekhar was also accused on “spreading hatred among people by misusing social media,” (HindustanTimes, 2017). This occurred after the government (B.J.P.) suspended all internet services in Saharanpur to prevent protest organising from spreading on social media. This simmering conflict between Thakur and dalit is just one example of how “many Dalits convert out of Hinduism because of the entrenched caste system that gives little space for their upward mobility,” (Aljazeera, 2017). Jinesh Mevani, a Gujarat lawyer who campaigns for dalit rights, has shown support for the Bhim army, stating that the situation of the dalit conversions are “not merely an expression of Dalits defending themselves against upper castes, but an assertion of and by Dalits against the relentless oppression they continually face,” (Aljazeera, 2017).

One of the most upsetting things for the dalit converts is that, whilst they felt they were not taken seriously by the police during the violence, they are still not taken seriously in regards to their conversion. One police officer stated that “Buddhism is only a branch of Hinduism. Like some people go to Arya Samaj temple, some people will go to Buddhist temples. Everybody at the end of the day is Hindu,” (Agarwali, 2017). This is a perfect example of the entrenched caste system within Indian society. For this Hindu, and many other Hindus in India, there is no escape from the caste system. To them, converting to Buddhism does not change anything. Unfortunately, this shows a weakness within conversion as a means of escaping discrimination. If Dalits are still seen as Dalits, whether they are Hindu or convert to Buddhism, they will always be treated with the same discrimination by Hindus that they felt before their conversion. However, their new identity can give them access to a sense of community, which has helped some groups to achieve social and economic mobility. This will be explored fully later in this chapter.

Neo-Buddhists and location in India

Just as location of Buddhist followers around the world affects their Buddhist beliefs, location within India is also equally influential over Buddhism and conversion. The latest census showed that while the population of Buddhists in India grew by 6.13% from 2001-2011, the population of Hindus grew by 16.76%. At first glance, this could suggest that conversion to Buddhism has not been entirely successful with the dalit population. However, previous indications that conversion is used primarily as a political tool for Dalits suggests that these statistics are not an adequate representation of the successfulness of dalit conversion. This fluctuation in numbers can be attributed to a variety of factors that affect the community, such as politics, location and social interactions.

As India is such a large country with a huge population, one of the factors that affects Buddhist conversion is location within India. Most Buddhists reside in the North/ North East states of India. Maharashtra has the largest concentration in India, with a 58.3% of the state's population declaring themselves as Buddhist (CensusIndia, 2001). Maharashtra holds 90% of India's Buddhist population, which grew by 11.85% from 2001-2011, where the population of Buddhists residing in Maharashtra now standing at 6.5 million (Moudgil, 2017). Sandeep Upre, the president of Satyashodhak O.B.C. Parishad, an organisation that conducts initiation rites programmes in Maharashtra, believes there is a reason that the Buddhist population is so high: "Constant influence of social reformers, including Jyotiba Phule and BR Ambedkar, has ensured that people here are more aware and secure enough to leave their Hindu identity," (Moudgil, 2017). Uttar Pradesh is another Northern state with a large concentration of Buddhist residents. A possible reason for this could be that Uttar Pradesh has important Buddhist pilgrimage spots, such as Sarnath and Kushinagar. It is also known for its considerable support for the B.S.P., a political party known for its support of dalit rights (Moudgil, 2017).

Looking at a southern state in India, Karnataka has seen a decline in Buddhist population by 75% between 2001-2011. This is particularly interesting as this follows an upsurge of 439% from 1991-2001. This is likely to have been in response of the B.S.P. winning their first assembly seat in South

India. As the sway of the B.S.P. has declined over recent years, this explains the lower percentage of Buddhists in Karnataka. Another political reason that has attributed to this is that caste certification was denied by state government in Karnataka. This resulted in the exclusion of neo-Buddhists from reservations in education and employment. Although the government of India changed their policies in 1936, labelling neo-Buddhists as scheduled castes, Karnataka never publicly acknowledged this change. Therefore, it is possible that some dalit Buddhist converts still retain their Hindu caste certificate and declare themselves Hindu in government surveys, as a way of maintaining their reservation advantage (Moudgil, 2017).

How has conversion to Buddhism helped Dalits within the community and with their fight for social justice?

Conversion to Buddhism has helped the dalit communities in a variety of different ways. In terms of identity and community, an increase in spiritual strength can be seen among the Neo-Buddhists, who feel they have been given a voice and a platform to air their grievances over caste discrimination. They also feel a sense of community among other Buddhists and loyalty towards their religion, which perhaps they were not so passionate about previously, as they felt consistently humiliated and exploited. An example of this change could be seen in Gaya, in May 2015. During the Buddha Jayanti celebrations, to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha inside the Bodhi Tree in Gaya, B.J.P. protestors marched upon the celebration waving black flags. They were led by former minister Prem Kumar. The Neo Buddhists responded to the protest by waving slogans demanding total Buddhist control over the Bodhi Tree in Gaya, as it is recognised as the seat of enlightenment. The shrine is currently under joint management by both the Hindus and the Buddhists. Despite the protest, the current minister Nitish Kumar participated in the celebrations, which included mantras dedicated to world peace. The Buddhist management team of the Bodhi Tree in Gaya also presented a cheque of Rs 21 Lakh for relief to the survivors of the Nepal earthquake tragedy (TimesofIndia, 2015b). This situation shows that, by converting to Buddhism, Dalits have found their 'voice' and are choosing to fight for their rights, which they may have felt they were unable to do before. Also, the joining in of minister Nitish Kumar indicates that there are some instances of acceptance between Hindus and Neo-

Buddhists which were previously Dalits. Although there is more understanding of Dalits converting to Buddhism as Hindus see it as a branch of Hinduism, it is still encouraging to see that there are some people in the India government that do not continue to discriminate using caste once a person has converted to Buddhism.

An example of other Buddhists reaching out to help Dalits in India can be seen through the work of Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG). This is the Indian wing of the Triratna Buddhist Community, an international Buddhist movement with over sixty centres on five continents. After Ambedkar's death, the TBMSG worked to develop a new Indian Buddhism, by fusing dharma practice and social action (Clear view project, no date given). Together with two of their related organisations, Bahujan Hitay and the Jambudvipa trust, they created the Manuski project. The mission of this project is to:

- 1) Transcend caste barriers through social development programs.
- 2) Fight social discrimination through legal and constitutional ways.
- 3) Develop dalit women leadership.
- 4) Create sustainability of the social projects and build solidarity amongst the individuals and organisations (Manuski Project Summary, 2008).

So far, this project and the TBMSG has built a network of over 150 organisations working for the marginalised communities in India (TBMSG.org, no date given).

According to the 2001 census, the Buddhist population is just shy of 8 million people in India (CensusIndia, 2001). This shows that conversion to Buddhism is popular, and evidence suggests that it has helped Dalits psychologically to overcome interiorised attitudes of inferiority. This can be seen in the numerous rallies and protests where Dalits have praised Buddhism for treating all human beings equally and slated upper castes for discriminating. In 2001, Navayana Buddhist leader Udit Ray organised a large mass conversion. The Dalits that attended this ceremony carried flags and anti-upper caste banners. One of the Dalits that attended stated his reasons for wanting to convert:

I want to leave casteism and Hinduism. We are disgraced every day, at every place. We have to bear the stigma of casteism. Joining Buddhism is the only way to escape the chains of slavery. Buddhism respects and treats all human beings equally. It is the best religion (Singh, 2001).

Situations like this show the positive psychological impact that conversion can have on Dalits, and equally the fear of traditional caste believers who do not want Indian society to change. The police attempted to prevent this ceremony and mass conversion from taking place by placing ‘fraudulent’ banners outside stating that it had been cancelled. Dalit leaders took great offence to this interference, with leader Net Raj arguing that:

Is it done anywhere in the world to put barricades for the citizens of the country to stop them from performing a peaceful religious ceremony, the right which the constitution of the government guarantees? It’s the upper-class Hindus who are doing it as they are angry that we are walking away from their slavery and they are losing control (Raj, quoted in Singh, 2001).

Conversion to Buddhism has also helped Dalits by increasing literacy rates, allowing them greater work participation compared to scheduled caste Hindus. The current Buddhist literacy rate is 81.29%, compared to scheduled caste rate of 66%. Satpal Tanwar, a leader of the Bhim army, stated that “most Dalits are senior levels of administration are Buddhists,” (IANS, 2017). Maharashtra holds the second highest number of literate Buddhists, at 83.17%, after the rate in Chhattisgarh is as high as 87.34%. It is possible that Dalits have converted after education, which they receive to an extent via government reservations, as they become more aware of their rights in society. By using this knowledge as strength to challenge the caste system by converting to Buddhism, dalit converts now enjoy a higher work ratio as well. It’s been noted that 43.15% of all Neo-Buddhists are in paid employment, compared to 40.87% of scheduled castes (IANS, 2017).

Evidence looked at in previous sections has shown Buddhist conversion to be a successful psychological tool in the sense that it gives Dalits a feeling of self-worth and self-dignity.

Unfortunately, it has not been a complete success in terms of a political protests, as many Hindus still

view it as a branch of Hinduism and therefore, still view them as untouchable. But, although it has not been a perfect transition, overall conversion to Buddhism can be thought of as a relative success. It may not have completely eradicates social injustice against Dalits but it has empowered them, giving them an identity, a real sense of community and has inspired them to continue fighting the struggles they face. Rather than giving in and accepting discrimination as ‘the inevitable’ in India, they have used Ambedkar’s interpretation of Buddhism and statues of him as strength and motivation in their continuous fight for a caste-free society.

Christianity

This section will explore dalit conversions to Christianity as a means of combatting social injustice. The history of Christianity and Christian missionaries in India will be examined, and how this had an effect over the dalit communities. It will then illustrate the ways in which Christianity has helped and, in many cases, failed the dalit converts in their struggle for inequality. The differences between caste denominations and their treatment of Dalits shall be explored, with particular emphasis on the presence of caste discrimination that exists among dalit Catholic communities. This section will then examine the government reactions to Christian conversion, the political struggles that Christian Dalits face in India and the backlash of violence that has been caused. It will conclude with analysing whether or not Christian conversions have been successful in helping Dalits tackle the problem of caste-based social injustice.

Although considered a minority, Christianity is the third-largest religion in India, according to the 2011 Census. Its origins in India date back to the visit of Thomas the Apostle, in 52 AD (Jones, 2012, p. 93), but the most dramatic increase of Christians occurred between 1890-1930; this has been named the ‘mass movement’. Censuses have shown that the Christian population grew from 1,246,288 in 1872 to 6,020,887 in 1932 (Webster, 1992, p56). These mass conversions happened nearly twenty years before Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism, during the British Raj, which suggests the missionaries that came over at that time had an influence over these conversions. It has been noted

that Christian missionaries impacted Indian society both religiously and spiritually in a significant and consequential manner (Palsetia, 2006, p.616).

Why are Dalits choosing Christianity?

Dalits have seen conversion to Christianity as another way to escape the discrimination of the Hindu caste system, though in a slightly different way to Buddhism. Webster has argued that “the underlying motivation was the search for improved social status, for a greater sense of personal dignity and self-respect, and for freedom from bondage to oppressive land owners,” (Webster, 1994, p.54). To some degree, Christianity has been able to help Dalits achieve this goal, as Christianity in India has promoted health, education and economic dependence for Dalits. However, in some Christian communities, caste is still an active feature, preventing Dalits from escaping the discrimination and exploitation of the system.

In the late 1920s, the National Christian Council of India commissioned a study on the Christian movements. The findings of this study were published in a book by J. W. Pickett, who showed how “the movements helped to liberate oppressed Dalits and tribals from the age-old bondage of Hindu caste system,” (Pachau, 2014, p.158). This has also been observed by Sathianathan Clarke, who gave the following statement of dalit mass conversion movements:

Religious conversions are a conscious mobilization of disadvantaged communities. Religious conversion to Christianity was a community effort by the Dalits to denounce the symbolic worldview of conventional religion within which the legitimization of the all-encompassing caste-based social order works (Clarke, 2003, p.338).

Dalit Christian converts began during the British raj. As the Anglican church was the established church of England, it “had an impact on India with the arrival of the British,” (Dalal, 2014, p.177). The growth of the British Army led to the arrival of many Anglican Chaplains in India (Tovey, 2017,

p.197). Although the missionaries initially targeted the upper- caste, as they “hoped to instruct high-caste and well-born urban Hindus in English language, Eurocentric morality and the promotion of Christian conversion,” (Palsetia, 2006, p.617). Dalits converted to Christianity in large numbers because “they associated the value system of the Christian missionaries with the power of the British. Some low caste Hindus converted to avoid the stigma of being Pariahs,” (Doniger, 2010, p.584). The first Christian conversion is reported to have taken place in 1873 in Sialkot, by a man named Ditt (Jodhka, 2009). Then, “to the surprise of the missionaries, Ditt was followed by hundreds of thousands of others from lower castes, and Punjab Christianity became a de facto movement for the uplift of untouchables, perhaps the first one in modern history,” (Juergensmeyer, 1988, p.181). This proves Webster’s point that “the mass movement among Dalits were dalit movements initiated by Dalits and sustained by dalit heroism in the face of persecution,” (Webster, 1994, p.70).

How Christianity has helped Dalits escape from caste-based social injustice

In many ways Christianity has helped dalit communities in India. Whilst Catholic communities in India are associated with caste divisions, other Christian denominations such as evangelists/ protestants are providing Dalits with a community identity that is completely devoid of caste discrimination. One example of this can be seen among the Pentecostal communities. “Pentecostalism is, in reality, a highly adaptable social and religious movement, twisting and turning and transforming itself to adjust to the realities of a civilisation whose ancient roots continue to sprout new branches and leaves,” (Jones, 2009, p. 505). It attracts people from dalit and tribal castes because it provides them with a sense of dignity and hope that is non-existent in other sections of Indian society (Hedlund, 2000, p.3).

Pentecostalism is rooted in oral culture (Hollenweger, 1997, p.18). This is another reason why it’s so popular among Dalits. Most Pentecostals are poor, illiterate and live in slums, where facilities such as schooling and medical help are limited (Miller and Yamamori, 2007, pp.173-175). As slum based Pentecostal churches are poor and self-funded, and powerless to challenge caste-based discrimination, then why are they seen by Dalits to be the solution? Nathaniel Roberts argues that it stems from the

pastors' teachings: As the pastors are themselves from the slums, they "interpret and unconsciously adapt the Christian message in the light of their own lifetime experiences in the slum," (Roberts, 2017, p. 281). Therefore, the Christian teachings emerging from the pastor's experiences speak directly to the cultural needs of the slum.

To a large extent, Pentecostal dalit converts can live a life completely separate from the social ties of Hindu caste. Pentecostals do not view the problem to be caste related, but instead focus on the oppressors, who they call 'the rich', and themselves, who they self-describe as 'the poor', (Roberts, 2017, p.282). They do not identify as Dalits. Pentecostals understand caste to be "an effect of power, whereby the strong monopolize resources that should belong to everyone," (Roberts, 2017, p.283). They believe the sins of the rich lay with how they deny the poor humanity. As Roberts (2016) explains, "To be human is to be vulnerable, susceptible to harm. It is also to care instinctively about those who are in need, whoever they may be, and to feel called upon to care for them. And finally, to be human is to be worthy of being cared for by others. To practice caste is to cut oneself off from humanity, simultaneously dehumanising others and oneself," (Roberts, 2016, p.78). Pentecostalism teaches of a way to overcome this injustice. The church teaches that the sins of others can be overcome by love and prayer for others. By praying for the wellbeing of others, irrespective of their religion, it is believed that the Messiah will raise them and one-day God will bring justice to Earth (Roberts, 2017, p.292).

Pentecostal growth has predominantly taken place in the North Tribal belt- in states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Communal violence against Christians by Hindutva forces in these states provides evidence of perceived threat of the growing number of Pentecostal churches. Despite these attacks slum Christians do not identify themselves as being victimised as Christians. Instead they continue to view it as inhumane acts performed by the rich. Pentecostal Christians see themselves as liberators, not victims (Roberts, 2017, p.283). Typical Pentecostal teaching among these communities is that embracing suffering and refusing to strike back is the very means of their salvation: "The forms of self-restraint and willingness to suffer that the slum

church enjoins in the faithful are not optional but are what is absolutely required of them. This is what it takes to tap into the supernatural power of Christ, the only power that can save them and their families from misery,” (Roberts, 2017, p.293). This is why Pentecostal Christians do not view themselves as Dalits. The term dalit translates as downtrodden and broken, and Pentecostal Christians truly believe that they can save themselves, with the help of God. This shows that there are Christian denominations that have provided dalit converts with a means of escaping what they previously felt to be an inescapable cycle of discrimination and suppression.

Many Dalits have found peace and joy from Christianity as, unlike Hinduism, it teaches of a saviour who preached equality: “The same people who were told they weren’t worthy enough to enter a Hindu temple are finding that Jesus Christ touched lepers, sinners and other “untouchables” of his day and invited them to dine at his table,” (Grady, 2015). Christian missionaries are also working hard to improve dalit living conditions in rural areas, and improve education standards. Christian Aid has helped “contribute towards poverty reduction by empowering social excluded communities to combat discrimination, equality and violations of human rights, both social and systematic,” (ChristianAid.org, no date given). They also promote work that enhances the skills of individuals and communities to increase their productivity and gain access to land, water and other resources, services and support linked to sustainable agriculture and food security (ChristianAid.org, no date given). Also, the Christian missions charitable trust (C.M.C.T.) is an organisation that focusses on working to transform the lives of people in India without discrimination in caste, creed or race. The C.M.C.T. sponsorship program supports the educational needs of over 1500 dalit children in India (Christian missions, no date given).

A more specific example of Christianity helping dalit communities can be seen in the work of Raja, documented by Grady. He is a young evangelist working in South India who operates a home for abandoned girls. He provides food and clothes to neglected orphans and offers counselling to abused shop workers. He has a team that use motorcycles to reach remote villages where many of the local Hindus are highly resistant to other religions. He has planted churches in 32 communities (Grady,

2015). All of these examples show that dalit conversion to Christianity has been successful in terms of improving living conditions for Dalits in India. However, the presence of caste amongst Catholic India communities has limited how successful conversion to Christianity has been as a response for caste-based social injustice.

How Christianity has failed dalit converts

Not all Christian life includes an escape from India's caste system for dalit converts. Caste is dominant throughout the Catholic communities in India, resulting in Dalits feeling just as isolated and exploited as they did prior to converting to Christianity. An example of caste discrimination amongst Indian Christians can be seen in Trichy, Tamil Nadu, where the upper castes built a wall across the Catholic cemetery, in order to separate dalit burials (Natarajan, 2010). A small socio-political group, Periyar Dravidar Kazhagan, are protesting for the removal of the wall: "This violates the Indian constitution. It is inhuman, it's humiliating," (Natarajan, 2010). The Roman Catholic church has stated that it does not approve of caste discrimination but, in this instance, it is helpless in resolving the issue. This is because the burial ground is owned by private individuals (the upper castes). This statement has been challenged by another Christian leader, Father Lourdunathan Yesumariyan, who claims that the church does have legal power to remove the wall, due to the recent high court judgement that churches have full responsibility over graveyard administrators (Natarajan, 2010). It should be noted that whilst the church has not removed the wall, they have opened a new graveyard that is free from discrimination, in the hopes of easing the caste tensions. Whilst this act shows sympathy towards the dalit Christian situation, it is also allowing the caste discrimination to continue. Other examples of caste discrimination persisting in Catholic communities were found in studies conducted by David Moss. He highlighted that dalit Catholics are prohibited from accessing the streets where high caste Christians live, they have restricted access to village temples and teashops, and in some cases, they are denied access to common drinking water sources (Moss, 1994).

Tensions between castes in Christian communities have been known to end in violence. In 2015, in the southern state of Karnataka, hundreds of Christian Dalits were forced to hide in fields overnight,

to escape the rampaging mobs of upper caste Christians (Mondal, 2015). The Dalits tried to register the case under the SC/ST atrocities act but the police refused, as Christians lose their scheduled caste status when they convert (Mondal, 2015). It is during situations like these that dalit Christians feel that they have been let down by Christianity, as they have even less support as Catholic Dalits than they did as scheduled castes.

Another example of caste practices continuing in Christianity can be seen in the lack of inter-caste marriages among converts. The church encourages this by running magazines that carry matrimonial adverts containing specific caste references (Natarajan, 2010). It could be argued that to a certain degree, this is a choice among Dalits and other castes, as their partners are more understanding of their social and economic situation, if they share the same fate. It is thought by many Christian leaders that the intertwining of Christianity and caste is likely to always exist until the government gives dalit Christians reservations. Father G. Coscmon Arokiraj argued this point, stating that “For India Christians, caste is first, Christ is second. Attitudes in the church won’t change until the government helps raise dalit Christians’ social standing through reservation. Mere preaching won’t do,” (Sweas, 2012). Whilst it is true that preaching is not enough to change the entrenched caste views in Indian society, the previous chapter illustrated the reasons why government quotas are not enough to prevent this either. The strongest offence that could be used to tackle caste-based discrimination against Dalits is a united force of both government reservations and several different forms of dalit activism, all working towards the common goal of eradicating caste discrimination. This idea will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis. The presence of caste among Catholic communities has severely limited the success of dalit conversion as a means to escape caste-based social injustice.

The presence of caste among Indian Catholic communities has been the tipping point for a number of dalit converts. Whilst earlier in this section showed how the government has been accused of forcing reconversions back to Hinduism, there is evidence to suggest that many Dalits are choosing this path. In Kerala, 2015, a function organised by the Hindu helpline reconverted 47 dalit Catholics back to Hinduism, after the untouchables stated the group has done little to improve their status in India,

(Kottayam, 2015). Das, one of the former Catholics who was reconverted at this event, believed that “we were Catholics for the sake of the name alone. But we remained poor forever. The church never took care of us as we were Dalits.” (Kottayam, 2015). Unfortunately, not only do dalit Catholics continue to face caste discrimination, but are also denied education grants and reservations on the grounds that Christians do not recognise the caste system. Many Dalits have considered this situation and reconverted back to Hinduism as, although the discrimination will not change, at least they will have access to employment and education reservations (Kottayam, 2015).

These reconversions have raised controversy, as Christian groups are claiming them to be part of the Ghar Vapasi movement initiated by right-wing radical groups. The Archbishop Joseph Powathil states Ghar Vapasi events are “intended to spread hatred and anger against Christianity. Many believe this movement uses threats and lured, and conversions should be considered ‘forced’,” (Kottayam, 2015). Whilst it may be true that Dalits have felt a certain degree of pressure to reconvert, the Hindu helpline has provided some evidence that some Catholics have (apparently) converted freely. Parameswaran Saburaj, who runs the Hindu helpline, has shown applications signed by Christians seeking help of their own free will and choice to reconvert to original faith of their ancestors (Kottayam, 2015). However, as the Hindu helpline was created by the V.H.P., it is a Hindu nationalist service, and therefore the reliability of this source needs to be questioned. As the V.H.P. is a part of the Sangh Parivar, which has focussed on the prevention of dalit conversion, it is possible that the Hindu helpline is using Hindutva propaganda, rather than reliable evidence. This makes it difficult to determine how many Dalits are reconvert of their own free will, and how many have been pressured into it.

Reactions to Dalit conversions

Dalit conversions to Christianity were met with a much stronger negative reaction than conversions to Buddhism. This is mainly due to the fact that Christianity is considered a foreign religion in India, whereas Buddhism does have Indian roots. The majority of negative reactions towards Christian conversions stem from the R.S.S. and Hindutva ideology.

The R.S.S. (Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsēvaka Saṅgha) is a right-wing, Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation, that is considered the parenting party of the ruling organisation in Indian government, the B.J.P. (Bharatiya Janata Party). The objective of the R.S.S. is to reassert Hindu identity, and to make India a Hindu nation and a Hindu culture. The R.S.S. understanding of Hindu culture is:

A definition of a majoritarian and authoritarian nation where Hindus, under R.S.S. direction, will lay down the rules by which the minorities must abide. Its version of Hindu culture is inextricably mingled with antagonism against the non-Hindu... the rashtra (nation) is conceptually separated from the state and is defined as a cultural idea which embraces a community that resides upon a piece of land with which it shares an organic as well as emotional relationship (Basu, 1993, p.77).

The concept of Hindutva (Hindu-ness) is the ideology of the R.S.S. and the B.J.P., and is a combination of acknowledging the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the seas as one's fatherland as well as his holy land i.e the cradle land of one's religion (Basu, 1993, p.8). The V.H.P. (Viśva Hindū Pariṣada) are also a right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation that are under the umbrella of R.S.S. organisations. These groups are collectively known as the Sangh Parivar. This explains why there are so many anti-Christian protests and violent attacks occurring in India; The governing power is anti-Christian in their ideology.

These attacks include the killing of priests, raping of nuns, destruction of Christian schools, churches and cemeteries. It's been argued that government is using anti-Christian propaganda and the exploitation of communal difference to mask political and economic motives underlying the attacks. The human rights watch has accused the government of once-again failing to protect minorities in India. These attacks mainly affect the dalit and tribal communities who have converted to Christianity in order to escape abuses under the caste system. It has been stated that "a vested interest in keeping their communities in a state of economic dependency is a motivating factor in anti-Christian violence and propaganda," (hrw.org, 1999). There have been claims that eyewitness saw politicians

participating in these attacks, but Hindu nationalist leaders continue to portray them as incidents instigated by minority communities. The B.J.P. have blamed the violence on an “international conspiracy to defame the political party,” (hrw.org, 1999). This is another example of the government using minorities in India to mask their political and economic motives.

There are many examples of violence being used as a reaction to Christian conversion. On Christmas day in 1998, in Dangs (the smallest district in the state of Gujarat), Christians were badly beaten by self-proclaimed ‘patriots’ from the bordering state of Maharashtra, and they demolished nearly 20 churches (Human rights watch, 1999). This occurred as retaliation to a peaceful protest that Christians held on the 4th December in response to several attacks that had previously happened against Christians. Between the 25th December and the 3rd January 1999, a further 24 churches, 3 schools, and 6 houses/shops were burned, destroyed or damaged. Also, on the 8th July 1998, the body of a Christian was exhumed by a V.H.P.- led mob just 3 days after his burial and thrown outside the local Methodist church (Kang, 1998). In 1997 in Bihar, East India, a Christian priest was stripped naked and paraded for 5 kilometres through the streets (UCA news, 1997). On the 25th September 1998 in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, four nuns were gang raped (CSW.org.uk, 1998). The R.S.S. claimed this was a result of “anger of patriotic youth against anti-national forces... the direct result of conversion of Hindus to Christianity by Christian priests,” (Melanchthon, 2002, p.104). One of the worst cases occurred in Orissa 1999, when an Australian missionary and his two young sons were burnt to death in their car (Banerjee, 1999). Also, December 27th 2007 saw a mob of Hindus torch the house of Christian leader Radhakant Nayak. On the same day, eleven small churches and prayer houses were ransacked (FoxNews, 2007). This is another example of violence directed at foreign missionaries in India, as well as Hindu converts.

There have been many anti-Christian campaigns and legislations made to condemn Christians and prevent further conversions of Hindus to Christianity. A systematic campaign of lies concerning Christians was spread through leaflets and brochures. An example of this can be seen through Bajrang Dal (the youth wing of the V.H.P.) launching a Pol Kholo Abhiyan (movement to expose) against

Christians, claiming there is an unholy alliance between Christians and Muslims. Besides Christians, Muslims have also been a constant target of religion-related violence and discrimination by the B.J.P.. Muslims in India were the original “hate-object” of Hindutva (Melanchthon, 2002, p.106). Melanchthon explained in her article that, as Hindutva is an ideology of violence, it needs a hate-object to keep itself alive and must express itself through aggressions and vandalism. Whilst Muslims have always been targeted by Hindu nationalists, in recent years Christianity has also become a particular focus of concern due to the recent conversions. The Bajrang Dal activists distributed 5 million pamphlets to expose the “anti-Hindu and anti-national activities of the Christian missionaries,” (Melanchthon, 2002, p.104). They believe that the missionaries are out to convert Hindus en-masse and wipe out Hinduism from the land of its birth. The V.H.P. have warned society that India would be divided if conversion continued. This belief and fear can still be seen even as recent as 2008, when the V.H.P. general secretary demanded that foreign missionaries be removed from the country (Ians, 2008).

The government’s fear of losing control due to the number of dalit conversions to Christianity can be seen through their accusations that Dalits are being forced or bribed into converting. In April, 1954, the state government of Madhya Pradesh appointed the “Christian Missionaries activities enquiry committee”, who reported that the majority of foreign money received by Christian organisations for maintaining educational and medical institutions was spent on converting people: “The objective is to apparently create Christian minority pockets with a view to disrupt the solidarity of the non- Christian society and the mass conversion of a considerable section of Adivasis with the ulterior motive is fraught with danger to the security of the state.” These findings helped the Hindutva to create a strong political force against Christian missionary activities. Also, campaigns in 1998 claimed that “Christianity is a foreign religion. Missionaries are here mainly for converting the poor and gullible. Conversions are done by inducement, force and fraudulent means. The country will become a Christian country as “we” Hindus will be reduced to a minority,” (Christianitytoday, 1998).

Whilst conversion was the goal of missionaries during the British Raj, it cannot be argued that they are bribing or forcing conversion among the dalit communities in contemporary India. Christian leaders have pointed out that when Christians convert, they lose their reservation benefits, which is not an enticing offer (Singh 2002). Also, as Christianity is one of India's poorest communities, it is difficult to believe they are in a position to bribe people into joining them (Singh, 2002). Richard Howell of the evangelical fellowship of India defends Christianity, and explains that whilst the Christian message does often result in conversion, that is not the same as forcing people to convert: "The meaning of being a Christian is to give witness We preach Christ's message of love and equality. If you say it leads to conversions, yes it does," (Singh, 2002). Christians have fought back against the allegations of bribery, with retorts that the government use these arguments to hide their crimes against Dalits. John Dayal, secretary general of the All India Christian Council (AICC), argues that the government should be asking the Dalits why they are converting, rather than accusing Christian leaders: "Dalits are targeted, raped, murdered and exploited, not by Christian, but by the upper caste. Should scavengers and untouchables say with pride, 'we are Hindus'... why don't they ask Dalits why they're converting?" (Singh, 2002).

Why is the R.S.S. against conversion?

As highlighted in the previous section, the Government reports and campaigns over the last 70 years show that the Hindutva's dislike towards other religions and 'alternative Hinduisms' is deeply rooted in fear. It stems from the desire to have a strong, united country that has one singular identity. During the British rule, many high castes developed a 'Christianised' or 'western' mindset. When the R.S.S. started in 1925, towards the end of the British rule, it was part of their vigorous anger towards Christians. It is likely that their discontent derives from the traditions of seeing Christianity and white missionaries invariable as agents of western imperialism, and Indian Christians as collaborators with colonial rule.

It seems that the Sangh Parivar sees Christianity and these conversions as a threat to Hindutva's growth. It has been highlighted that the Sangh Parivar sees Christian commitments to people's empowerment as the root of the problem: "Their preferential option for the poor and the Dalits, their

missionary involvement in education and their affirmation of the worth and dignity of the lowest and their least,” (Sarkar, 1999, pp.93-94). The V.H.P. propaganda accuses Christian missionaries of breeding separatism in order to disintegrate Hindu society. They accuse Christian workers of not understanding the complexity of Indian culture. The Sangh Parivar feel the need to protect the status quo: “the foremost ‘mission’ of Hindutva is to contain this threat, and to stifle the impending subaltern ferment inspired at first by the Christian presence in the Indian context,” (Thampu, 1999, p.22). In an attempt to gain back the control that the Sangh Parivar think they are losing due to these Christian conversions, they launched re-conversion programs for the converted Christians. An example of this can be seen in the ‘ghar wapsi’ programme in 2015, where at least fifty people from both Christian and Muslims communities were reconverted back to Hinduism (Das, 2015).

It can also be seen that the Sangh Parivar’s anxiety is centred around the education of the minorities rather than the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. Evidence of this can be seen when Professor Amartya Sen tried to improve conditions in India by prioritizing literacy in education (Canton, 2014). The Sangh Parivar interpreted this as an agreement between Sen and Christian missionaries. The B.J.P. have not prioritized child education, with the claim that there are not enough funds, though in 2011 they spent \$4.9billion on nuclear weapons (Icanw.org, 2017). It is true that Christians have invested in education in India. Nearly 15% of school children in India study in Christian schools and 10% of university students study in Christian colleges (Melanchthon, 2002, p.107). The Government has attempted to counteract the influence of Christian education by introducing a curriculum that emphasises value education, religion, spirituality, and Indian identity and culture. This is part of the saffronisation drive of the R.S.S.. Saffronisation is a term to describe the Hindu Nationalist policies that seek to recall and glorify ancient Hindu cultural history. There have been proposals by the Vidya bharati (the educational arm of the R.S.S.) to make Sanskrit compulsory and make school children study the Vedas and Upanishads (Baweja, 1998). Despite all of this evidence, the human resource development Minister of the Sangh Parivar, Smriti Irani, has vehemently denied the charge of saffronizing education (TimesofIndia, 2015a).

Christian Reactions to violence and Proselytising Accusations

Despite these accusations and violent protests, Christian communities have not retaliated with further violence. Their overall responses have emphasised forgiveness towards the Hindu nationalists.

Christian leaders gave the following statement in regard to the violence they have received:

If persecution is the price we have to pay for our discipleships of the divine master, let us be ready to face it... The use of muscle power and violence is a sign of spiritual and moral bankruptcy. We must fight with the power of love, with spiritual power, prayer and penance with courage and trust in the lord (Melanchthon, 2002, p.109).

Christian leaders have issued statements condemning the attacks and called upon the government to protect the safety of minorities. Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, secretary general of Catholic Bishop's conference of India, stated that "we are distressed that people have begun taking the law into their own hands in various matters. This is not good for the country and not good for social and religious harmony. We call upon the prime minister to rein in these unruly forces and restore India's image," (Akarra, 2017).

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) brokered a meeting between Christian leaders and the V.H.P. on July 11th 2000, to remove discord and misgivings between the two communities (Basu, 2000). They have also resolved to continue working among the poor even if these attacks continue. Christians in India have been seen having public gatherings to pray and affirm their faith in Christ (AFP, 2015).

The church has not reacted to the violence targeting dalit Christians, which brings about the question of whether or not their Christian identities are overriding their Indian/dalit identities. If this is true then, although they are Christian, they are bereft of compassion for their neighbour, which is a

fundamental Christian teaching. On the other hand, it can be argued that the peaceful reaction from the Christians in India has only strengthened their position. Their forgiveness and non-judgemental attitude are some of the reasons that attracted Dalits to converting to Christianity in the first place. By remaining peaceful through these negative times, they are portraying a united Christian front, and perhaps showing Dalits that haven't converted yet and want to, that they need not fear violence at the hands of Christianity.

How successful has Christian conversion been as a response for caste-based social injustice?

The success of dalit conversion to Christianity can only be measured by separating how effective the different denominations have been. Catholic communities are still caste-based, due to the number of upper caste Christians. This has prevented Catholic conversion from being a successful response to the social injustice that Dalits face.

Pentecostal dalit converts hold a stronger position for fighting caste discrimination. These communities offer Dalits almost a clean break from caste, and converts have even rejected the term 'dalit', as they feel liberated and no longer oppressed. Pentecostalism has provided Dalits with a strong sense of community, and a means of salvation that they can acquire themselves through love and prayer. Christian activist groups and charities, particularly evangelists, are also heavily involved in organisations that help to improve the living conditions, poverty and education among dalit communities.

As the situations between denominations are so vastly different, particularly in their treatment towards Dalits, it is difficult to determine whether Christian conversion can be classed as a fully successful method for Dalits to use to combat social injustice. Pentecostal communities have been successful in providing Dalits with a way of escaping the label of 'dalit'; however, they still feel the effects of suppression in the fact that they remain in such dire conditions of poverty. Also, whilst to a certain extent the current national government turns a blind eye to Buddhist conversion as it is considered to be a part of Hinduism, they are fully opposed to Christian conversion. This makes it very difficult for

Christianity to be a perfect solution to dalit discrimination, especially when they are denied reservations once they convert to Christianity, but in some communities, it has provided Dalits with a certain degree of relief from the entrenched caste perceptions of Dalits.

Conclusion

This section will examine the successfulness of conversion as a whole, and compare it to the success of affirmative action. Conversion has been partially successful as a response to caste-based social injustice: Buddhism provided many Dalits with a means of political protest, and Christian organisations have fought hard to combat the lack of reservations by helping improve the living conditions of Dalits. Overall, conversion to Buddhism has formed a stronger response to dalit injustice, as it provides a united interpretation of Buddhism and the rights of equality that Neo-Buddhist converts are fighting for. Whilst some Christian denominations, such as the Pentecostal communities, provide Dalits with a certain degree of relief from caste discrimination, there is a divided view among the Christian communities around the treatment of Dalits. Buddhism has also allowed Dalits to be considered a separate identity and yet still benefit from government reservations, whilst even Christian communities that feel separated from caste discrimination, are still stripped of their reservation rights.

However, just like affirmative action, it has not been completely successful in eradicating caste-based discrimination. One of the problems with affirmative action is eligibility, and how some Dalits dread receiving the label of minority because it only increases discrimination against them. To a certain extent, conversion can solve that problem. One of the reasons Dalits converted was to give them a chance to hide their dalit identity. Whilst affirmative action helped to give Dalits a platform to voice their grievances, Ambedkar has helped to boost this confidence even more among Dalits. Buddhist converts are the most common among dalit protests. Unfortunately, most Roman Catholic converts do not share this confidence. For the majority of cases, they still live in fear of the upper castes. This is where it is clear that conversion has fallen into the same pitfalls as affirmative action when attempting to combat social injustice. It is the entrenched prejudices of Hindu society that have prevented

conversion from being successful. Most Roman Catholic communities are bound by superstitions of pollution, in the same way that many are against allowing Dalits to have places in employment, as they are considered polluted. At the same time, the government is trying to prevent conversion because of the Hindutva ideology that Hinduism is the only true religion of India. All of these problems and discrepancies are centred around the problem of education that Dalits should have completely equal rights to all other castes. It is doubtful that India will reform the education system to teach these equalities, particularly with the current accusations by the Congress party that the government is 'saffronizing' education (Times of India, 2015c). This shows that Ambedkar was right in his position that it is impossible for Dalits to ever have equality whilst being a part of Hinduism. This thought process could perhaps be taken a step further and suggest that Dalits will always be subject to discrimination in India, despite what religion they are. Evidence in this section has shown that, even when Dalits convert, they are still affected. The only solution to this problem would be if Dalits left India altogether, which is not a realistic solution. As long as Hindus continue to believe that Dalits are impure and polluted, caste discrimination will still continue to exist in Indian society.

Chapter 3:

Dalit women's activism

This chapter is focussing on the treatment of dalit women as one form of social injustice that Dalits experience. Studies have shown that caste-based social exclusion is more acutely felt by dalit women than by dalit men, because the women experience greater 'untouchability' and ill-treatment, from dominant caste women and men (Shah et al, 2006). Dalit women experience discrimination in the form of caste-based exploitation by upper castes, as well as patriarchal discrimination within their own castes. This chapter will explore the daily lives of dalit women, and the different methods of activism that dalit women are using to achieve equality in society. These effects of these methods, such as joining NGOs and using microcredit loans, will be analysed, illustrating how they have affected their positions in both positive and negative ways. It will also explore the relationship between dalit women and women of other castes, and how this alters the effectiveness of dalit women's attempts for upward social mobility. I will also examine how two dalit communities received access to the same sources of help, and yet yielded completely different results. This chapter will discuss the reasons behind the relative success of one dalit community compared to the other. Finally, I will analyse the effects of dalit social mobility on the dalit domestic household, and how dalit women are now facing similar patriarchal oppression to upper-caste women.

Daily lives of dalit women

The daily lives and treatment of dalit women need to be examined, in order to understand the effects of upward social mobility and discrimination by caste. As dalit women are victims of three types of exploitation (class, caste and patriarchy), they have been termed 'thrice Dalits' by dalit woman activist, Ruth Manorama (Grey, 2010, p.13). Before exploring the daily lives of dalit women, it assists in understanding their daily struggles, and the various methods they have used to combat their oppression in both the community and domestic environment.

The treatment of dalit women is inextricably entwined with dalit men and their relationships with upper castes. After British colonialism and the outlaw of untouchability, Dalits had an increasing awareness of their human rights. This led to tensions brewing between upper-caste land owners, who felt that Dalits were stepping out of place, and dalit labourers. This resulted in many atrocities against Dalits, most of which targeted women and children, as a way of 'teaching Dalits a lesson'. An example of this occurred in Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu, in December 1968, where 16 women and 23 children were burned alive (Teltumbde, 2017, p.62). On top of these atrocities, dalit women also suffer domestic violence as a result of the patriarchal caste system. Dalit men suffer relative powerlessness in society, which they often compensate for by lording it over their women at home.

Everyday violence

Violence against dalit women is a major problem in Indian society. Violent attacks against dalit women occur on a daily basis, and are not considered to be serious issues by upper castes. This attitude originated in the Code of Manu, where the killing of a dalit woman is justified as a minor offence, equal to the killing of an animal (G.O.I., 2007, p.2). National figures showed that in 2000, 23,742 cases of atrocities against Dalits were registered, and it is estimated that 75% of these were against women (Grey, 2010, p. 43). Grey argues that "the reality is that Dalit women suffer violence on a spectrum ranging from insults, accusations of low morals and loose living, sexual harassment of many sorts, to beatings and even gang rapes. In fact, when a dalit woman is raped it is often not called "rape" and it is not reported as such," (Grey, 2010, p. 44). Less than 5% of attacks of violence make it to court (Harding, 2001). This highlights the fear of women to intimidation and the refusal of police to follow up the cases. Police in India are known for their caste prejudices, and for often punishing Dalits who ask for their help. Teltumbde argued that, "The police, the main agency of the administration interfacing with ordinary people, play an outright anti-dalit role in every caste conflict," (Teltumbde, 2017, p.65). This shows that dalit women have no definitive place where they can find safety from violence and other forms of discrimination. Grey reported how pregnant women have been attacked by police, and miscarriages caused when they've appealed to the police for help (Grey, 2010, pp.46-47). Upper caste use violence to vent frustrations regarding the growing upward

social mobility of Dalits. As The Hague Convention of Women's Rights in 2006 argues, the "perpetrators enjoy virtual immunity from persecution for violence against dalit women, as the police, who themselves often harbour caste prejudices, wilfully neglect to enforce the law," (The Hague, 2003).

It can also be argued that the Code of Manu condones violence within Hindu marriages. 'Imam hi *sarw*' has been translated as 'It is the duty of all husbands to exert control over their wives. Even physically weak husbands must strive to control their wives' (Harad, 2016). However, although the traditions of this text are deeply rooted in Indian society, it is important to remember the age of these texts, and therefore, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the code of Manu is the main cause of contemporary domestic violence. The code of Manu has also been questioned over how much influence it had over actual conduct. Manu is a Brahmanical view of how things should be in Brahmanical ideology, but it is "unclear of how accurately it reflects social reality," (Flood, 1996, p.66). It is also important to highlight that this is only one translation of the code of Manu. The section that this translation has been taken from, Manusmrti 9.6, has also been translated as, "even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives," (Manu, 2005, p.190). This portrays a slightly different message, although 'guarding' implies a patriarchal attitude and can be thought to imply a degree of control. Valerie Mason- John argued that rape within marriage is actually quite common: "Often men force their wives to have sex; the husband feels it's his right and duty because she is his wife. He may beat her and she rarely says anything to anyone about it, because that would bring shame upon her," (Mason-John, 2008, pp.57-58). India's N.C.R.B. highlighted that, in 2013, 118,866 cases of domestic violence were recorded (Pandey, 2014). This emphasises that domestic violence is a serious, widespread issue across India.

Caste-based violence against Dalits is an equally serious issue. Gabriele Dietrich suggests that "against such violence, the men of the dalit community can often not 'protect their women' and it is therefore perceived as a collective weakness and vulnerability," (Dietrich, 2001, p.204). Raping dalit women is seen as a way of humiliating dalit men, who are powerless to retaliate (Webster, 1995,

p.17). As explored later in this chapter, rape is associated with dishonour. An example of caste Hindu backlash against dalit women can be seen in Karnataka, where upper castes raided a dalit household, physically assaulted the son, and raped the teenage daughter in front of the village's statue of Ambedkar (Seenarine, 1996).

Devadasi sacrifice

Devadasis, meaning servant of the God, is the sacrifice of young dalit girls to the local temple goddess and is a strong aspect of dalit women identity. Burnad Fatima highlights the appeal of Mathamma sacrifice to dalit communities, as there is a lack of medical services, and families sacrifice their daughters to the temples, in the hopes that the goddess will cure them. In the cases where the children do get better, the child is then married to the goddess, and belongs to the temple, where they dance to earn a living (Fatima, 2002).

Devadasis has become an issue for dalit women activists and feminist activists in recent years, as it is believed that the girls are often exploited sexually by upper caste men. Although the practice was outlawed in 1982, as many as 15,000 girls in rural areas are dedicated to god each year (Grey, 2010, p.50). Poverty is the main reason behind this practice. Dalits sell their daughters to the temples, not only for the money, but also in the hopes of providing their daughters with a stable and safe lifestyle. This devotional practice, and both the positive and negative effects it has, will be explored in greater detail further in this chapter.

Daily work and employment

Violence is not the only characteristic of Indian society that affects the daily lives of dalit women. The lives of dalit women are very difficult on a day-to-day basis. They are responsible for the survival of their family. This not only includes paid labour, to ensure their family has enough money to survive, but also the daily household chores. Robert Deliege describes the work of dalit women: "The women work as hard as the men, without counting the household chores, which they must do as well," (Deliege, 1999, p.129). These jobs can prove to be difficult to complete, as dalit women face

untouchability practices and discrimination related to the simplest of tasks, such as the collection of water (Mangubhai and Capraro, 2015, p.264).

The paid labour of women is equally difficult and often fraught with danger. Dalit women are treated as inferior to men and exploited economically in the workplace, as they receive lower wages to perform the same tasks (Shrivastava and Tanchangya, 2015, p.182). Women also face a vulnerability for sexual harassment on the way to and from, or during work (Grey, 2010, p.33). As mentioned earlier, rape is a huge problem in dalit society, and it often occurs in the dalit workplace. In 2013, 2072 cases of rape were recorded, according the National Crime Record Bureau (N.C.R.B., 2013, p.430).

For many dalit women, particularly in the urban context, manual scavenging is the way they earn their living. This is the “term used to describe the job of removing human excrement from dry toilets and sewers using basic tools such as thin boards, buckets and baskets, lined with sacking, carried on the head. Manual scavengers earn around 60p a month,” (Ramaswamy, 2005, p.4). Over 95% of manual scavengers are women, as men are becoming occupationally mobile, and have increased opportunities that offer more money outside of the villages (Sarfarez, 2017). This shows the continuing gender discrimination, as not only are women left with the humiliating and degrading jobs whilst the men socially progress, but they are also exploited in regards to wages. Women earn as little as ten rupees each month for scavenging, whilst men earn up to 300 rupees cleaning sewer tanks on any given day (Sarfarez, 2017).

Non-government organisations (NGO), Self-help groups (SHGs) and the relationship between dalit and non-dalit women in India

SHGs and micro-credit loans have had one of the biggest impacts on dalit women’s activism in India. These groups aim to bring women together to claim their rights collectively. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. The practical implementation of SHG is very complex, and the different identities of

women often serve to divide them rather than unify. The NGO (non-government organisations) staff use these differences and exploit them for their own purposes.

Since the early 2000s, providing a platform for women to join together and help each other has been a policy promoted by the Indian government with the SHG programs. These SHG took the form of savings and credit groups, of between 12-20 women. Sometimes these groups linked together and formed larger groups known as 'federations'. An example of this can be seen in 1980, when the Rural Women's Liberation Movement (RWLM) affiliated with the NGO, the society for rural Education and Development (SRED). Around 15,000 women formed this collective (Anandhi, 2017, p.109). These groups are focussed on promoting women's livelihoods. The 2006 report of the working group on poverty elimination stated that, "It is well recognised that SHGs are appropriate grass-root level institutions for attacking multiple deprivation," (G.O.I., 2006, p.20). According to the Indian government, these groups address some of the most neglected deprivations of the poor, such as health security, have contributed to the eradication of child labour and spread awareness about AIDS (G.O.I., 2006, p.45).

Despite this report, over the past few years a range of investigative studies have raised serious doubts regarding the effectiveness of SHGs in India. SHGs believe that local communities and women's communities in particular, can empower the poor, strengthen grassroots democracy and bridge the gap between local and national institutions (Guerin and Kumar, 2016, p.161). It seems that, in India, poor women are expected to show a natural willingness to assist development projects. But, as many women live in fear of violence and other forms of discrimination, it is unlikely they would risk the social and domestic backlash that is associated with political activities. These punishments, that often occur in their domestic setting, are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Rao argues that, whilst women's participation in SHG was thought to promote solidarity and trust, the evidence suggests that, in reality, it is a technique that shifts the costs and responsibilities of rural development onto poor women (Rao, 2008).

As discussed previously, SHG provide women with microcredit loans, allowing Dalits to escape from the control of the upper-castes. These loans are intended for the use of starting up small businesses, but this is rarely the case. Kalpana (2011) argues that microcredit is mostly spent on consumption and thus fails to promote self-employment, even if it sometimes reduces vulnerability (Kalpana, 2011, p.56). Garikipati argues that, although SHG are intended to help women in India, microcredit loans benefit males in households rather than women, as they have very little control over household assets (Garikipati, 2008, p.2621). This is not always true. Often, dalit women have the control of household finances, but they have to use the money to ensure the survival of their family and the payment of debts. This can become difficult, as will be seen in the final section of this chapter, when upward social dalit men expect the money to be spent on ensuring the upkeep of their family's new social status (Anandhi, 2017, p.107).

Microcredit loan eligibility

SHGs are local groups that are subject to local political factions. As a result, they “reproduce pre-existing inequalities along the various social divides, such as gender, class, caste, religious and political affiliation,” (Guerin and Kumar, 2017, p.161). These inequalities are apparent among the divisions of microcredit loans. The criteria for loan allocation varies significantly depending on caste identity. Although NGOs on paper exist to assist Dalits with social uplift, in reality many NGOs actually worsen gender and caste bI.A.S.es. This, in turn, affects the relationships between dalit and non-dalit women, as they are not treated equally. This discrimination and identification by caste creates mistrust on both sides.

Examples of these discriminations can be seen in the eligibility of loan application. In order to be eligible, dalit women have to submit to various NGO demands, including free favours and services to the upper castes running the NGOs. It also involved compulsory participation by dalit women in various public events, whilst attendance was not compulsory for women from other castes (Guerin and Kumar, 2017, p.179). Also, the selection criteria targeted women who were physically attractive, well dressed and comfortable to talk in public. This was to ensure appeal to the influential male

visitors that financially supported their organisations (Guerin and Kumar, 2017, pp.175-176). This deeply bI.A.S.ed selection criteria created a huge disadvantage for dalit women, as they were often seen as unrepresentable, and penalised them by only offering smaller loans, whilst the entrepreneurship loans were given almost solely to the non-dalit women members. This is extremely unfair, as most often dalit women are in the greatest need of financial help. In this way, microcredit loans have failed to help the financial burdens of dalit women.

Interestingly, it is not only dalit women who have suffered due to this process of allocation. Some non-dalit women complained about these requirements, as their caste norms required them to not have contact with unknown men, and remain in their houses. It also caused some husbands to become suspicious about their wife's behaviour (Guerin and Kumar, 2017, p.176). This links to the idea of women being central to the family's honour, as contact with unknown men would make women seem promiscuous and dishonourable.

Relations between women were further agitated by the NGO policy that prevented dalit field workers from having any communication with their non-dalit women members. The NGO enforced this policy because it was felt it would be too degrading for non-dalit women to have to deal with dalit staff. Non-dalit women claim it is almost impossibly humiliating to take loans from Dalits (Guerin and Kumar, 2017, p.174). This does not help to create equality between Dalits and other caste women, but is instead enforcing caste divisions.

The positive outcomes of NGOs

Despite the existence of caste-divisions among some NGOs, in many ways they have assisted dalit women in fighting oppression. Dalit Mahila Samiti (D.M.S.) is an organisation of dalit women working in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. Founded in 2003, D.M.S. has set specific goals to help dalit women, including the promotion of leadership of local women, the protesting of all forms of violence against women, and ensuring that government scheme benefits are reached by all eligible Dalits (Andharia, 2008). They have been rather successful in meeting their goals. D.M.S. is involved

in the struggle of dalit women against the practice of untouchability by organising play performances in the villages, questioning untouchability in order to raise dalit feminist consciousness. They are also working towards ending purity/pollution practices, by encouraging Dalits and upper castes to share meals. They have been seeking to end violence by supporting victims and reporting cases to the police, ensuring justice for dalit communities in Uttar Pradesh. An example of this could be seen in 2003, when they extended support for justice when a pregnant dalit woman was assaulted by upper caste women (Shrivastava and Tanchangya, 2015, pp.185-186).

The Christian Aid programme has also been working to support dalit women through the violence they face. The Dalit Stree Shakti (D.S.S.) programme has been working since 2005 to organise dalit women. It works with women to devise strategies for change, boosting self-confidence and self-esteem as dalit women (Mangubhai and Capraro, 2015, p.269). They support women to take up cases of caste-based violence and domestic violence. In cases of domestic violence, the D.S.S. set up counselling sessions for both parties. If this fails, then the woman is supported to take legal interventions. They monitor the onG.O.I.ng cases, supporting victims to pursue justice and not to be pressured into compromises with the perpetrator (Mangubhai and Capraro, 2015, p.269). However, considering the violent backlash that dalit women often face when reporting cases of domestic violence, the provided counselling sessions may actually place these women in more danger.

Nude worship and conflicting interests

Despite the good intentions of these programmes, their help is not always appreciated in dalit communities. In 1986, activists of the Dalit Sangharsh Samithi and the women's collective, Manavi, tried to stop the annual nude worship bettaliseve in the Chandragutti temple. The ritual involves bathing in the Varada river and then running naked to the temple, about 5 kilometres away (Tharu, 2014, p.152) The activists planned a major intervention to dissuade the women, and to use the force of the state if necessary to prevent the ritual from taking place. Krishnappa, a leader of the D.S.S., claimed that these types of practices are “uncultured and barbarous” (Epp, 1997, p.332). But the dalit worshippers taking part in the ritual forced the reformers to retreat, by turning violent: They “beat up

some of the social workers; cameras were broken and policewomen were stripped,” (Radhika, 2012, p.310). This shows that some Dalits are happy to continue their traditional forms of worship, as rituals such as these are encompassed in dalit identity. Therefore, the attempts made to reform these rituals by other upwardly mobile dalit communities are both misguided and insensitive.

All of these examples show a varied response to SHGs and NGOs as a response to the social injustice that women face. To a certain degree, they have helped to provide these women with an awareness to their rights, and a confidence to fight for these rights. Some programmes have attempted to offer support to victims of violence, where the local police so often fail to do so. However, it may be the case that this support causes further problems for dalit women, and places them in danger of more violence. Also, it has been highlighted that whilst the intention of microcredit loans is to relieve dalit women of some of their debt, and to provide them with relief from being financially dependent on the upper caste, it has put them at a disadvantage in other ways. Not only are these loans difficult to receive, due to the allocation criteria, but they have also enforced the caste divide between dalit and upper caste women. In some respects, this is the worst outcome that Dalits could face, as it has increased the social injustice and discrimination that they now face in daily village life.

Honour and the revitalisation of patriarchy in dalit communities

For the majority of cases, the discrimination that dalit women face is linked in some way to ‘honour’. Honour is an integral part of India’s perception of women, as the modesty of women is seen to reflect the honour of an Indian household. As the honour of women is such an important reflect of families as a whole, an increase in control over dalit women’s actions can be seen in upwardly mobile dalit communities. Welchman and Hossain explain the understanding of honour is “vested in male control over women and specifically women’s sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential,” (Welchman and Hossain, 2005, p.4).

George notes that “individual honour is usually subsumed to family and religious or caste community honour,” (George, 2006, p.37). As this is the case, “only public actions can cause dishonour,” (Derne,

1995, p.153). This is why upper caste women are kept inside of their homes, to eliminate the possibility of being considered dishonourable and immoral. Dalit families who have increased social mobility seem to place an emphasis on family honour, which in some ways reflects upper caste traditions of honour. It is likely that this is because these Dalits want to prove they are equal to other caste families in all ways, and to shed the stigma of pollution and unworthiness that is associated with being a dalit. Still enforces this view: “When economic circumstances allow it, Dalits adopt/and/or enforce a gender ideology similar to that of higher status groups,” (Still, 2011, p.1128).

Honour and the lack of autonomy

This is why increased social mobility is not necessarily a positive thing, in regards to the treatment of dalit women. Srinivas noted that a rise in social status amongst dalit communities has resulted in harshness towards dalit women (Srinivas, 1956, p.484). An example of these changes can be seen in the dalit community of a South Indian village called Nampally. Overall Dalits residing in this village are in a much better position compared to most rural Dalits in India. Most dalit women are occupied with agricultural work, whilst the men have gained independence by finding work in the city. The women are also active in village politics and knowledgeable of their rights (Still, 2017, p.194). This gives the impression that the dalit women have benefitted from their community’s upward social mobility. As Dyson and Moore argue, lower caste women have more autonomy than their upper caste counterparts (Dyson and Moore, 1983). However, this increased mobility has actually decreased the dalit women’s autonomy, and placed them under much stricter control by their husbands. Dalit men have begun trying to make their women appear more respectable, by seeking to withdraw their wives from farm labour (Still, 2017, p.194). They are also preventing them from engaging in political activities, as female activists are considered ‘hussies’ and ‘forward women’ (Gorringe, 2017. P.264). By removing their wives and daughters from these public situations, dalit men hope to show their family as ‘honourable’, and nothing like previous caste judgements that Dalits are polluted and have no honour. This is known as Dalits “adopting a bourgeois housewife ethic and Hindu ‘seclusion’ identity,” (Still, 2000, p.79).

In many ways, housewifization can be considered a positive thing for dalit women. They are no longer bound to discriminating upper caste, and do not need to suffer through hard manual labour for little pay. Heyer argues that investing time in their home and children, rather than labour, can prove hugely beneficial to dalit families, as they are likely to have better health (Heyer, 2014). However, dalit women who have the privilege of being a housewife, also suffer from a complete lack of independence.

Dalit marriage and sexual assault

Employment is not the only area of life that socially mobile dalit men are controlling. Before upward social mobility, dalit marriages used to be more flexible (Deliege, 1997, p.183). Often young dalit men and women would choose their partner, and then their parents would contrive an “arranged” marriage later (Still, 2014, p.138). Now, in socially mobile dalit communities, there is an increased emphasis of arranged marriages and dowry- practices that are traditionally upper caste (Anandhi, cited in Gopinath, 2005). This is, once again, not necessarily an improvement for dalit women. As Deshpande argues, dowry and arranged marriages further decrease the autonomy of women and reinforce patriarchal tendencies (Desphande, 2002). This decreased autonomy can lead to difficulties in filing for divorce or escaping from abusive husbands (Still, 2017, p.202). Parry enforces this argument, stating that the decline in divorce rates amongst dalit communities goes hand in hand with gender inequality among Dalits (Parry, 2001, p.788).

However, withdrawing dalit women from agricultural labour also ensures that women are not sexually accessible to upper caste males. This can be viewed as a necessary precaution, as the sexual exploitation of dalit women has been so normalised historically that upper-caste men have viewed the bodies of their dalit women labourers as their right (Kannabiran and Lalitha, 1989, p.182). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, rape and sexual harassment is a powerful form of caste domination. Violence and rape occurs frequently in villages where upward mobility is taking place, as “groups assert their status by seeking to humiliate or shame the other,” (Gorringe, 2017, p.259). As Pandian explains, “Vanniyars are armed with a heightened sense of caste pride to establish their difference and

superiority over the Dalits,” (Pandian, 2000, p.504). As the Dalits increase their social mobility, this angers the upper castes who believe they are superior to the Dalits, and therefore violent retaliations occur. This is argued by Anandhi, Jeyaranjan and Krishnan, who believe that “the assertion of Dalits has contributed to the unmaking of upper caste masculinity in the public domain,” (Anandhi, Jeyaranjan and Krishnan, 2002, p.4404). This makes it understandable that Dalits wish to protect their women from these attacks, but it is also an attempt to protect the dalit community’s honour as well. This is because sexual exploitation is taken as a direct affront to reputation of dalit castes as a whole (Still, 2017, p.203). Rape and sexual abuse “instantly strips the woman, her family and her caste group of honour while simultaneously emasculating her husband and the men of her caste and kinship groups who have been shown to have failed to protect her,” (Baghel, 2009, p.216-217).

The pressures of withholding their family’s ‘honour’ and the tensions between upper castes and Dalits in these situations, also leads to increased domestic violence. Rogers argues that the reason for this is that “dalit men resort to a form of hyper-masculinity in response to their marginality which valorises male physical strength and control over women,” (Rogers, 2008, p.80). This is a huge issue for dalit women as, not only are they in danger of constant abuse at home, but their increased control by the dalit men also prevent them from seeking help from the programmes and SHGs that are put in place for this very reason. Gorringer highlights this as the paradox of contemporary dalit mobilisation: “It inspires women and brings them out of their homes and villages, but then fails to address the social problems that they raise,” (Gorringer, 2017, p. 262). Even on the larger scale of Indian politics, Dietrich points out that “one of the main issues that dalit women activists encounter is domestic abuse, and this is one of the key silences in most dalit politics,” (Dietrich, 2001). This is because dalit parties wish to better dalit lives by elevating their social status, but they remain reluctant to address the internal problems of patriarchy and gender discrimination, (Gorringer, 2017, p. 265). In this way, dalit political parties and upward social mobility has not assisted dalit women in their battle for social justice.

In conclusion, an increase in social mobility is tied to an increased awareness of family 'honour'. This has led to a decrease in the autonomy of dalit women and a loss of dalit women's identity. The attributes that distinguish them as dalit women, such as agricultural labour and freedom to walk about the villages, are being controlled by the socially mobile men who wish to preserve their slightly elevated social status. Although these changes have been positive in helping to minimise the risk of sexual abuse against dalit women by upper caste men, it does nothing to prevent the domestic abuse they continue to suffer at home. In a way, this highlights that, as dalit women obtain a slight escape from discrimination in the community, they face double the discrimination at home, as they are prevented from having any escape from abusive and controlling husbands. This concern with honour has also led dalit communities to mimic beliefs and practices of upper castes, the same beliefs they despise for the inequality they place upon Dalits. This shows the complexity of the struggle for equality that dalit women face.

The effects of upward social mobility on the lives of dalit women

An example of how dalit women have used social mobility as a means of fighting caste oppression can be found in the state of Tamil Nadu. In the village of Valluvapuram, there are two dalit communities, the Adidravidar Dalits and the Arundhathiyar Dalits. Although both of these dalit communities live in the same village, they have had very different experiences of social mobility. The Arundhathiyars have remained trapped in tied agricultural labour relations with the Naidus (dominant caste), due to their longstanding debts (Anandhi, 2017, p.99). They also continue to practice the dedication ritual of sacrificing/marrying their daughters to Mathamma, the village goddess (Anandhi, 2013). This further enforces their dependence on the upper caste, as the Mathamma girls become sexually available to the Naidu men, as the men are 'patrons' of the Mathamma temple. This results in them being identified as 'sacred prostitutes'.

Whilst the Arundhathiyar caste are unhappy with the caste discrimination that they face at the hands of the Naidus, they have not refuted the traditional caste practices. The Arundhathiyar men have defended the Mathamma dedication practice, claiming that the girls are not involved in temple

prostitution, and dedication is seen to be part of the cultural identity of the Arundhathiyars (Anandhi, 2017, p.101).

In contrast, the Adidravidas Dalits are very upwardly mobile in their daily lives. They have used SHGs and NGOs to create an independent economic situation, separate from the Naidus. Also, the Adidravidas are known for protecting and defending their women regularly (Anandhi, 2017, p.102). This has resulted in decreased sexual vulnerability of Adidravidas women. For the majority, Adidravidar men and women are completely independent from the upper castes (Ong, 1999, p.53). Adidravidar women have accomplished this upward social mobility with the assistance of NGOs, such as the Rural Women's Liberation Movement (RWLM), commonly known as the sangam, and the Society for Rural Education and Development (REDS), a non- government women's organisation. The REDS aim is to "mobilise the innocent and exploited women to empower them through systematic approach with the help of various government agencies" (redsngo.org, 2017). The Sangem has been very effective in helping to mobilise the Adidravidar women and empowering them to fight for equality. E. Connolly argues that it has allowed them to display a new dalit politics of 'becoming'. By definition, a politics of becoming is at work when a group that suffers cultural stigma attempts to rework its identity, that was imposed on it by various institutions. In this instance, it's referring to the caste system. Connolly argues that the endured suffering opens up possibilities for a new political movement (Connolly, 1999, p.51).

Sangem attempts to ban the Devadasi rituals

The Sangem was even successful at encouraging women to stand together and form a 'collective', as the mobilised Adidravidar women tried to assist the socially oppressed Arundathiyar Mathamma women. They fought to ban the dedication ritual, and for the Naidu patrons to provide an adequate and respectable livelihood for Mathamma girls. The RWLM also provided Mathamma women with entrepreneurial training in order to start their own small businesses. Devadasis dedication was made illegal in 1947, under the Tamil Nadu devadasis Act. Under this act, dedicating girls to Hindu temples is forbidden (Sithannan, 2006, p.21). Despite this law, Devadasi dedication is still practiced among

dalit communities. The Supreme court in Karnataka has described the practice as an 'evil' done to women. The court advocate, V.K. Biju, contended that neither were the police enforcing the law nor were the state government properly utilising funds allocated for the rehabilitation of the girl who were pushed into the Devadasi system (Rajagopal, 2016). This shows that the Mathamma girls who feel discrimination against and are sexually exploited require the help of the NGOs, as they cannot rely on the police or their community's men to put a stop to it. Many Mathamma girls were pleased with this assistance, as these actions gave them self-respect and challenged discrimination. It has been claimed that the Mathammas have faced violence within their caste, when they tried to claim their rights: "Arundathiyar men were brutally repressive towards the Mathammas, closely monitoring their movements and forbidding their association with Adidraavidar-led Sangam since the Sangam was campaigning against the sexual exploitation of the Mathammas," (Anandhi, 2017, p.101).

However, some Devadasis objected to the bill and the interference by the sangem, because "they considered themselves sophisticated and learned artists rather than prostitutes," (Ramamrithammal, 2003, p.100). This is not surprising, as scholars such as Ramberg have argued for a different interpretation of Devadasi life. Whilst these girls are dedicated to a local goddess and the temple, it has been argued that they live a much better life than dalit women who marry a husband. Ramberg studied the jogatis community in Karnataka who offer their daughters in marriage to the goddess Yellama. She argues that the girls have more agency and value than dalit women with husbands, as they claim certain privileges that are usually bestowed upon a son, when they are dedicated to the goddess. These include arranging marriages and making payments for jobs for the children of their sisters (Ramberg, 2014, p.33). Cecilia Van Hollen enforces this view, stating that "having been dedicated to the goddess, these women gain and produce value, power and respect that parallels the power of Yellamma as an unmarried goddess." (Van Hollen, 2015, p.22) Ramberg also argues that the lives of village-based devadasis and village-based conventional married women are one and the same. They "both generally maintain a lifelong exclusive orientation toward one man, both rely on their relationship for means of economic survival, and neither takes cash payments for sexual acts (Ramberg, 2014, p.33). This is showing that their lives are no different from the Adidraavidars women,

and yet Mathamma girls are considered prostitutes. Ramberg believes the view of dedication girls as prostitutes is a result of colonisation, as many categories referring to people being associated with labour practices, sexual arrangements and performative arts (such as Veshya, sule, kanki, etc.) could not be conveyed in English terms. Therefore, “these distinctions collapsed into the figure of the prostitute,” (Ramberg, 2014, p.44). Despite this, many Mathamma girls are happy to continue being dedicated to the Goddess, and this is an example of how feminist and dalit right groups can cause more problems than they resolve.

Panchami Lands

The Sangem also assisted the dalit women with their struggle to recover Panchami lands. Panchami lands were assigned to Dalits in Tamil Nadu during the British rule, and can neither be sold nor re-classified (Anandhi, 2000, p.2). These lands are extremely important to dalit women in particular, as it gives them a chance to farm their own land and be independent from the Naidu upper caste. The Panchami land rights campaign was created in 2008, led by a partnership between ActionAid India and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.). This campaign was a success, and 10,000 applications for Panchami lands were submitted (Binoy, 2010, p.50). It is this success that makes the Sangem-led struggle so important. In 2009, 300 acres of Panchami lands were taken by a high court judge, Justice P.D. Dinakaran, and the Sangem led the struggle to retrieve them. The demands were taken to court and sadly, they did not win back their lands. However, it was not a total failure. The dalit women continued to fight for their lands for many years and, in 2012, dalit women planned to lead a protest and plough the land that legitimately belonged to them, with the support of the Women’s Front and the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front. This attracted the attention of local government enforcers, and a peace meeting was called between the Deputy superintendent of police, the Sub Collector and the village leaders. They came to a peaceful agreement and many lands that had been taken by upper castes were returned to Dalits across the Villipuram district (IRDS, 2012).

Dalit Community Tensions

Tamil Nadu has been very effective at implementing development schemes, which have had an impact on the upward mobility of Adiravidas women. The MGNREGA was one of these schemes, a 100-day work programme that had a high level of Adiravidas women participating. (Kalairasan, 2014, p.62). They have also used the microcredit loan schemes, which have allowed them freedom from debt to the Naidus, and provided them with an independent image (Anandhi, 2017, p.116).

However, the Arundhathiyar women have found these programmes difficult to take part in. Their men have controlled their participation in these projects, claiming that the Adiravidas Dalits are not trying to help them become socially mobile, but are attempting to claim a higher caste status for themselves by labelling the Arundhathiyars as backwards and unmodern (Anandhi, 2017, p.111). Their choices to continue the dedication practices has also prevented them from being eligible for microcredit loans, as they do not fit the strict criteria required. In this way, it is the Arundhathiyar men and their choices to continue traditional caste practices that are preventing their women from obtaining social mobility. The Adiravidas women have proved that it is possible to become socially mobile, and their men support and encourage their actions.

This section has shown how SHG and NGO can be used by dalit women as a successful means of combatting social injustice. The Adiravidas challenged and subverted the discrimination they have faced with success, and have rejected the Naidus attempts to identify them as untouchables and polluted. Although they were not successful in their fight for Panchami lands or the abolition of Mathamma dedication, they have been able to use their voices and create a life for themselves that it separated from the discrimination they used to face by the Naidu upper castes. Although Arundhathiyars did not find the same success amongst the SHG as the Adiravidas, it can be argued that, to a degree, their lack of success was self-inflicted. They refused help provided by the Adiravidas, and are content to continue dedicating their daughters to the temples, which is further enforcing caste exploitation and discrimination.

Conclusion

Dalit women's activism faces the same issues as all other forms of dalit activism that have been explored throughout this thesis. Dalit women face the struggle of oppression in traditional dalit settings, and also in upwardly mobile settings; the actions of these oppressions may differ, but the inequality still remains. This chapter has shown once again that education and the entrenched social divisions of caste are key elements as to why dalit women remain the victims of discrimination. Dalit women face judgement and punishment in all areas of their lives, both socially and domestically. NGOs and SHG have provided Dalits with a certain platform for progress, such as the Adidraavidar community establishing independence from the upper caste Naidus and the women fighting for the abolition of Mathamma dedication, but it has not been possible to fully remedy caste discrimination against dalit women. To some degree, NGOs have made the separation between women in Indian society worse, by enforcing and encouraging the discrimination of dalit women by other caste women. Also, the fear and segregation that Dalits have faced has also affected the relationships between different dalit communities. Instead of supporting each other, often dalit communities are suspicious of one other and believe any help that is being offered by another dalit community has an ulterior motive of portraying them in a negative light.

Dalit communities that have found upward social mobility brings about a completely different kind of oppression towards dalit women. Domestic violence is a lot more frequent in socially mobile dalit households, as there is anxiety to uphold the family's new-found 'honourable' social status. Dalit women have more restrictions placed upon them, reflecting the traditions of upper-caste families. Whether dalit women are physically or sexually abused at home, or in the community, the police do not offer a safe solution. Dalit women often encounter further violence and abuse when seeking help. This shows that, regardless of dalit women's upward social mobility, they have no support from other dalit communities, the local police, or other women. Therefore, regardless of the elements of progress that have occurred in women fighting for equality, these successes are relative when compared to the oppression and segregation that dalit women still suffer in Indian society.

Conclusion

This section will attempt to summarise the arguments made throughout this thesis, and answer the four research questions laid out in my introduction.

How the caste system affects the lives and treatment of Dalits?

It is clearly evident that the caste system is the focal point of Hindu society. It is the religious foundation in which Hindu hierarchy and Indian life was built upon, and it is interwoven into every aspect of Indian contemporary culture. The caste system was behind the creation of the notion of 'untouchability' and is the reason why pollution and caste-based discrimination is still occurring in India, over 60 years after it was outlawed. The caste system hierarchy is a huge factor that affects government decisions, employment, education and law enforcement services. It is entrenched in the belief systems of millions of Hindus across India, which makes it nearly impossible to escape from.

Has the government attempted to close the gap of inequality?

Since untouchability was outlawed, the government created A.A. in the form of employment and education reservations, in an attempt to bridge the social inequality between Dalits and other castes. This was not completely successful. In many ways, it has worsened the social divide, as it has segregated and labelled Dalits as minorities, which has caused an increased vulnerability for them in terms of caste-based violence and further discrimination. The reservations have angered upper castes, as jobs that were previously occupied by them are now being reserved purely for minorities. This has caused some violent backlash to occur.

The lack of implementation of government reservations and lack of consequences for companies who are not following quota percentages hints that the government may not be as concerned with eradicating untouchability as it appears. This suggestion is enforced by the vast inequality in education. Education is one of the biggest issues affecting discrimination and caste-based oppression in India. If every child received the same level of education, which taught of equality and not of

entrenched social divides, this would solve the issue of Dalits being considered polluted by others. Also, if they received the same level of education, it would solve the issue of education quotas, and the claims that dalit children should not receive reservations as they cannot keep up with the workload. Furthermore, by providing children with equal access to education, they would grow up with knowledge of their basic human rights. Eventually, if children continued to receive equal education enriched with teachings about people viewed as equals rather than steps in a hierarchy, then A.A. would no longer be necessary. A.A. has not been a complete failure in regards to the dalit quest for social justice, but an important stepping stone. It has provided Dalits with a voice and a platform, to encourage them to fight for their own equal rights.

In what ways have Dalits fought for their social inequality?

One of their biggest issues that Dalits face is their lack of belief in their own self-worth. This has occurred through generations of oppression and Dalits being told they are unworthy, once again due to the teachings and beliefs of India's entrenched caste divisions. As the government has been unable (or unwilling) to eradicate this prejudice, Dalits have begun to seek an escape from Hindu society.

Religious conversion has been reasonably successful for providing this escape. Dr. Ambedkar was fully motivated to his ideal of scrapping Hinduism and encouraging Dalits to convert en masse to Buddhism, in order to live a peaceful discriminatory-free life. Neo- Buddhism has been successful in providing a unified interpretation of Buddhism for Dalits, and a united front to fight caste-based discrimination. However, it has not been strong enough to provide a discriminatory-free life for Dalits. As Buddhism is viewed to be a branch of Hinduism, it prevents converts from identifying as completely separate from Hinduism and its caste system. This further enforces that it may never be possible for Dalits to escape caste- related stigma and oppression whilst residing in a Hindu-based India. The only positive aspect of being encompassed in Hinduism is that Buddhist converts are still entitled to reservations.

Dalits that converted to Christianity to escape caste-based social injustice have faced a worse situation. Conversion to Christianity has been heavily objected to, and seen as Dalits abandoning their religion and their God. Dalits have faced severe penalties for converting, including the denial of government reservation rights. Perhaps the loss of reservations would have been worth it if dalit converts could have lived a discriminatory-free life, but that has been proved impossible amongst Catholic communities, who are still heavily influenced by the caste system.

Furthermore, conversion to Christianity has also caused an increase in caste-related violence, as upper castes and Hindu nationalists are retaliating to the conversions. This enforced that Dalits will never be free and safe whilst the entrenched social divisions remain; They are treated poorly if they accept the social status that have been given, and are punished if they try to improve it.

This can also be seen in the daily lives of dalit women, as they face oppression in both traditional and upwardly mobile settings. In the traditional setting, women are treated as sexual slaves and objects by the upper castes. Even women from upper castes treat them as polluted and untouchable. The steps that have been supposedly put in place to assist dalit women to gain independence from upper castes; in reality have only served to enforce the social divisions between women. This is another indication of the government being content for the existence of caste discrimination to remain in India.

In the communities that have been successful in creating social mobility, the dalit women then face discrimination within their own households, at the hands of their husbands. They are often controlled and become victims of domestic violence. This is the result of a society built upon hierarchy. Those at the bottom live in constant fear of being punished for a social status they cannot control and, when they finally achieve an elevation in society, the fear that it will be taken from them culminates in anger and resentment of their own kin.

Will Dalits ever live in a life free of discrimination?

It is for these reasons that the issue of untouchability has remained a huge contemporary issue in Indian society. Those in power are not truly committed to resolving the issue of caste, and those affected by the social injustice do not have the means and influence to change it. In order for the practice of untouchability to be truly eradicated, India would need to undergo a complete reformation of its education system and the religious foundations in which its society is built. In effect, India would need to denounce the entire caste system and all of its encompassing beliefs of hierarchy and discrimination. This would remedy the caste-based oppression that Dalits have faced for centuries but, in doing so, it would splinter the entire foundation that Indian society is built upon. This seems to be the only way to remove the entrenched notion of untouchability from Dalits, which would enable them to live as equals in India.

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